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Feathers on the moor

FEATHERS ON THE MOOR



FEATHERS ON THE MOOR

BY
ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER 1874-

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TO
JOSEPH H. WHITEHORN
SESSION-CLERK
OF ST JOHN'S WOOD CHURCH
IN AFFECTION AND
GRATITUDE

I crossed a moor, with a name of its own
And a certain use in the world no doubt,
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone
'Mid the blank miles round about :

For there I picked up on the heather
And there I put inside my breast
A moulted feather, an eagle-feather !
Well, I forgot the rest.

BROWNING

PREFACE

I UNDERSTAND Browning's words to mean that, as we cross the moor of life, it is our good fortune, now and then, to have gleams of inspiration light upon us that send us onward with uplifted head. Some happy, thrilling thought of God or man falls upon us, from the skies as it seems, and the blank miles round about are glorified. That is, in the poet's figure, to find an eagle-feather—a witness on the moor to the heavens high above it.

Eagle-feathers, however, are not often to be found, for eagles are very rare creatures. But commoner birds of the air have feathers, too. And these are some that I have picked up on my moor.

ARCH. ALEXANDER

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“And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw Zaccheus.”

(LUKE xix. 5.)

I

THE WAY OF THE LINKED ARM

HERE, in the story of Zaccheus, we see a man being saved for the Kingdom before our eyes. But when we look for the machinery, the method of it—what is there to see? There was no preaching, no religious talk, no prayer even, none of the things that we commonly associate with the saving of a soul. There was merely a gesture of friendliness, a kindly unexpected word, a grasp of the hand.

Of course, it was not an ordinary person who offered himself in friendship to Zaccheus, it was Jesus—and that means much, indeed, it means everything. Nor was it to any man, chosen at haphazard, that Jesus thus held out His hand. Zaccheus had a history and needs, and something in the bottom of his heart that made him a person to receive this grace. It was not mere idle curiosity that brought him there. That he should be willing to put himself in a conspicuous position, the last thing a tax collector would wish to do, shows that he really wanted,

for some reason of his own, to see Jesus face to face.

Yet how much, after all, did he know about Him? There was, of course, the reputation that Jesus had. The crowd among whom Zaccheus stood had not come there for nothing. There were stories about, which Zaccheus must have heard, of the kind of man that Jesus was, and the things He said and did. These doubtless played some part in drawing him there.

But the fame of Jesus was a purely religious and spiritual one. He spoke of God, He knew God, and He had, as it seemed, the very authority of God, as no one, that ever Zaccheus had heard of, had. Perhaps, to Zaccheus, He was the greatest of the prophets, maybe the promised Messiah Himself. And that is possibly as far as Zaccheus had got, till He came face to face with Jesus Himself. And then the sum of all he had heard vanished like a candle in the sunlight!

What is this divine and perfect fascination of Jesus that took men captive on the spot, and that still does so? It cannot be put into words. You can feel it, and surrender to it, but, for description, what is there to say except that He is Christ and there is none other? What it was in Jesus that captured Zaccheus is an endless question, but one to which every soul has

some sort of key who can humbly confess that Jesus has captured him. Purity, holiness, pity, strength, love to the uttermost—add them all up, and the sum is still far short of the spell of Jesus. In His mere presence the very air was different, and things impossible were done.

Whatever it was that constituted the wonder of Jesus, we can see quite clearly how that wonder was brought into this man's life. This is the very crux of the matter, and it were well to be clear about it. What gave entrance into the life of Zaccheus of all that Jesus meant, and was, and brought, we can see. It was *human fellowship*! It was His linking His arm in his, and walking away with him. The very grace of God, the utter mercy of the Highest flooded into Zaccheus' life with a shock that completely converted him. But it all came through the hand of Jesus stretched out to him in brotherliness. It was the fact that this wonderful Man laid Himself alongside Zaccheus, put Himself on his level, did not talk down to him or rescue him from a remote inaccessible height—it was that that won Zaccheus. There was a height, and before Zaccheus knew it, he was looking up at it in reverence and worship, and turning from his sin. But it was on the level of simple brotherly human kindness that Jesus came to Zaccheus first.

If we ever need to be reminded what a divine thing human kindness is, we have it written memorably here. If we want to know how to bring spiritual help to some one who sorely needs it, here is the road that Jesus took, the road of brotherhood and fellowship, the way of the linked arm and the outstretched hand.

And that, in all reverence, is the very essence and glory of the Incarnation. Our fathers, in their time, allowed themselves more liberty than we do in imagining what God thought or felt about certain things. With the answer in Christ Jesus already known to them, they loved, for example, to picture Almighty God knitting His brows, as it were, in thought as to how He could redeem His sinful world of men. They thought of that as God's problem, and one of them said, "It is a problem worthy of God," and they rejoiced to think that they knew the solution—Jesus Christ. We do not so often pursue that line of thought, perhaps because we feel more strongly that God's thoughts are not as ours.

But if we might do it, this once, and conceive of the Father faced with all the possible ways of saving men and winning them to Himself, it would greatly heighten our wonder at the way He took. What was that way?

It was just the lowly road of simple human

fellowship, coming among them as a brother, sharing their sorrows and bearing their sins. That is the glory of the Incarnation and of Jesus, that He, the very Love and Mercy of God, is down beside us, offering His friendship to us, with all that that implies. The Incarnation means Jesus, at your door and mine, with His hand outstretched in invitation and goodwill.

*“The Lord shall preserve
thy going out and coming in,
from this time forth and for
evermore.”*

(Ps. cxxi. 8.)

II

GOING OUT AND COMING IN

ONE thinks of the author of this lovely poem, the 121st Psalm, as a shepherd or a small crofter in the hill country, a simple, hardworking, godly soul, who loved his home and loved his hills, because they spoke to him of God. It has been finely said that “God has His sacraments in the visible world, and one of them is the hills.” There are some of us who have tasted of that sacrament, have sat at that Table, and know that the Lord is there. Let those who love the sea, choose it, and be grateful. There are others for whom it is the hills that bring healing and rest and big quiet thoughts of God. And that is how the Psalmist felt.

As he stepped out in the morning, it was the sight of the hills that awoke anew in his heart the faith that the strong God who made these would watch over him and his. And at the evening, when he came back, his day’s work done, to wife and child and rest and home, it was a last look at the hills that helped him to

remember that it was the Lord who had blessed his coming in.

It is a very simple religion, but it has been the strength of many brave and true men and women through the centuries. When David Livingstone left his humble home to do his great work in darkest Africa, his sister tells that "We got up at five o'clock. My mother made coffee. David read the 121st Psalm and prayed. 'The Lord is thy Keeper. The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night.' Then he walked to Glasgow to catch the Liverpool steamer. He never saw his father again." The same simple faith runs like a golden thread through the greatest biographies.

The Psalmist is linking his little life on to the Eternal, not in its big days or its crises only, but in its ordinary routine, its humdrum, everyday going out and in. He had got beyond the idea that the Divine is only to be seen in the unusual or miraculous. God kept him and cared for him, he believed, through every common working day. It is not only when our blinds are down, and life has grown dark and cruel, that God is near us. We are His children, and every least concern of ours is also His: our going out and coming in, on the most uneventful day of our lives, are watched and regarded by Him. It is Jesus

Christ supremely who has brought this thought of God into ordinary daily life. Men fishing, sowing a field, shepherding strayed lambs, a woman sweeping her house, children playing in the market-place—He saw God in all these things, and it is from Him we have caught the faith that the same is true of these ordinary daily lives of ours and their smallest concerns.

Going out and coming in covers the whole of life, up to the last coming in of all. It makes home the centre of it, the citadel from which we sally, the refuge and shelter to which, however the sally fares, we can, thank God, return. Life to-day is a far more tense and risky and complex business than it was for this godly old shepherd of long ago, but we have all the more need on that account to garrison our spirits with the recollection that our goings, too, are kept by that Love of God of which, for us, Jesus is the pledge and witness.

Our goings out have their special perils. Not merely those that are material, the swift accident, the arrow that flieth by noonday, but, far more, perils to character, risks to honour and integrity, the temptation to forget, as we handle the visible things of business, that man liveth not by bread alone. Our calling as Christians is to follow Him along the hard, dusty roads of daily business.

And it is good to remember that there is a special grace of God for those who have to go out, that we go not alone, for there is One with us who knows temptation, and can succour us when we are tempted.

And the incoming has its perils too. We are not on our guard at home. The restraints are off. We are home. And the temper or the sneer which had to be kept back in the office may slip out in the home. We can't be churlish or sulky or touchy outside and not be dealt with for it by our fellows as we deserve. But we can bring these moods home, and dump them there, and love can suffer long and be kind. We need the grace of God, if we are to be worthy of the homes we have, no less than we need it for the facing of the day's darg with courage and a quiet mind. And the Psalmist reminds us that the help we need is waiting for us, as we come in, if we but claim it and use it.

Let us add to the outgoing and incoming that make up our day the remembrance, as we go out, that the Lord is with us, and if the day is to be hard, that His help is always near ; and in the evening, our thanks for the day's mercies, and the blessing and the rest of home, where also He abides with us. For the light and the joy of home are as the "shining of His face." And

the love and understanding, the laughter and happiness of home, what are these but "fruits of His Spirit"? It is a very, very simple religion, but we might be healthier and happier in body and mind if we practised it, and we should certainly be better men and women.

"A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed."

(LUKE x. 33.)

III

A BUSINESS MAN'S RELIGION

THERE are many good people who think of the sphere of daily duty, and all the material business of life, as, so far as religious service is concerned, a sort of neutral territory, a no-man's-land. When they review their Christian discipleship, it is their off-duty participation in the work or worship of the Church they think of, rather than of the many more hours devoted to business or profession. Because these do not count, as they think, for religion, they give themselves with a more wistful earnestness to specific recognized religious service, when they are released from business, as if to atone for, to sanctify an "irreligious" day. It is a noble ideal, but essentially a mistaken one. Jesus Christ is a more gracious and understanding Master of men than that view assumes. There is a better way, though not an easier one.

Jesus Himself, let us remember, lived in touch with what we now call the business world. He did not spend His perfect, God-revealing life in

a spiritual hot-house, but in the hard, practical world which we all know. Jesus was not always in the Temple or synagogue—not so often indeed as the priests or levites. He was a carpenter, not a levite, nor a priest. He saw the streams of merchandise flowing along the trade-routes of the day, and He accepted that as part of life, in the scheme of the Father, like sowing and reaping or caring for the sheep and lambs. He never spoke a word in disparagement of Commerce, as such.

More striking still, in the immortal story that He told to illustrate that true neighbourliness which, in His eyes, is the very essence of practical religion, He made the hero of it, not a cloistered priest, or a professionally holy person, but a business man! For that is what the Samaritan was, a trader, a commercial traveller. When all is said about the perils of business life, let it not be forgotten that it was a business man whom Jesus selected to be the example and pattern, for the Christian centuries, of religion in active operation.

And not only so, but it was actually during the course of his day's business, and not in the evening or his off-duty spell, that he perfectly fulfilled what, for Christ, was the half of true religion. It is clear, therefore, that Jesus regards the busy

hours of daily labour in an entirely different way from what many of us do. We are not told anything about the Samaritan's prayers, or the services he attended, though doubtless these had their place in the formation of his character. We are shown the fruits of them in daily business. And it is the business part of his life that is held up as a model and example of true religion. Our blessed Lord looked with approval on the spirit of this man's working day, though he *did* buy and sell, and strike bargains, and make money, because he had love in his heart for his fellows, and was quick to help where he saw need.

Surely it is a misconception of what the Spirit of Jesus means for the world, and the redeeming of its work, to suppose that the *only* way to do His will, and to serve the Father in Heaven during business hours, is by having a prayer meeting in your office? If the chances and accidents of practical daily life do not often bring us to folk with broken bones, at any rate there are broken hopes and prospects about us in plenty, misfortune and suffering and sorrow. To play the Samaritan in any kind of way to any such is also to serve God, is also true religion, is worship as acceptable to God, if Christ is to be witness, as any that could be offered in the most

gorgeous of temples. The nature of our business takes most of us at some time or other out on to the Jericho road, where the "hard-lines" cases are to be met, and our Christian discipleship is put there to its supreme proof.

As if to make that abundantly clear, Jesus deliberately contrasts the spirit of this business man, giving himself whole-heartedly to a brother in need, with the frigid failure of two conspicuous religious professors. The priest and levite were not necessarily either vicious men or hypocrites, but they were slaves of a conventional system of religious service, with its routine, and its definite times and seasons, and they were not willing to have that disarranged. Apparently they were going down to Jericho when this happened, their term of service in the Temple being over for the time. But even if they had been going the other way, up to the Temple, I cannot think it would have made any difference. We know that Jesus never belittled the stated, formal, public worship of God at certain fixed hours. But it is clear that, if the choice lay between keeping these hours, and this urgent human need by the roadside, there is not the ghost of a doubt which choice Jesus would have approved. Even if the Temple service should have to wait, this was, in His eyes, the more pressing religious duty. This

was how God was asking to be served and worshipped at the moment.

Surely this is a story for all Churchmen to take often and prayerfully into consideration, lest haply, with all our services and routine, we be failing, like the priest and levite, when tested by our conduct on the hard Jericho road of daily business. It is clear that it is there Jesus Christ stands watching His disciples, even though He is also present "where two or three are gathered in His Name"; and He estimates the worth of our many services, our prayer meetings and zeal for His House, by this one thing, whether all that is making us more willing and quick and ready to cross the road, to take the risk, to sacrifice our comfort or time or money, or even our worship at some stated hour, to help the brother who lies wounded there.

Fiona Macleod says that in Pharais, which is Celtic for Paradise, "there are no tears shed, though, in the remotest part of it there is a grey pool, the weeping of all the world, fed everlastingly by the myriad eyes that, every moment, are somewhere wet with sorrow or agony or vain regret or vain desire. And the redeemed, as they walk there, stoop and touch their eyelids with that grey water, and it is as balm to them, and they go healed of their too-great joy. Their

songs thereafter are the sweetest that are sung in the ways of Paradise."

It is meet and right, in this our lower world of God's, to give Him thanks in our stated assemblies, and to sing praises to His Name. But the praise that is sweetest in His ears, even on earth, must come from those whose eyes have been touched at the grey pool with pity and sympathy and love for their brethren. God needs priests and He needs levites, and He has blessed and owned their labours with abundant recognition. But still more, He needs Samaritans. For the priest only sanctifies the place of worship and prayer, and that is holy already. But he who takes the spirit of the Samaritan into the daily world of business and traffic, makes *that* a holy place, and both serves and worships God there.

*"Our conversation (R.V.
citizenship) is in Heaven."*
(PHIL. iii. 20.)

IV

COLONISTS OF THE KINGDOM

PROF. MOFFATT's re-translation of this passage is, "We are a colony of Heaven," which invests it for us with a new reality and romance.

But even yet, I think, it needs some qualifying. If every one had always written and spoken wisely about heaven, with the restraint that befits our ignorance, we might let the phrase stand. But there are many earnest souls to-day, who, because we have turned the matchless poetry of the New Testament into the baldest prose, and hardened its beautiful symbolism of the heavenly City into a mere topographical description, are shy of the very word heaven and reject the popular conception because, they say, it is not spiritual enough to be Christian. The word we use must be supremely spiritual if it is to express Paul's thought. So it were well to put out of mind, meanwhile, the idea of Heaven as a place, to forget about the gates of pearl and streets of gold, and think of it as the Kingdom of Heaven, or the Kingdom of God, to which belong

all who know and love God, in the faith and fellowship of Jesus, that kingdom which includes everything that is true and pure and lovely and of good report. That is what Paul means by the word he uses. We are colonists of that kingdom, he told the Philippians.

And right well they understood, for Philippi was a Roman colony. The Roman ex-soldiers and their wives and families who had been settled there years before were fired with the purpose to make Philippi as like Rome as possible. They wanted to bring Rome's spirit and laws and civilization into the daily life of their adopted town. They were colonists there, for Rome.

And that expresses perfectly what a Church and individual Christians should be—colonists in this world for the Kingdom of God, in touch with it, pledged to it, owning supreme allegiance to its King our Lord Jesus Christ, and seeking by any and all means to bring the spirit and laws of that Kingdom down into this common everyday world. Whatever helps to "build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land" is colonists' business.

And how much need there is! Who can say that in this England of ours the will of God is being done? There are great tracts of our civilization, our business, political, industrial and

social life that are not Christian, but purely of this world, as Philippian as Philippi; and our privilege is to swing it "Romewards," to do all we can to make it conform to the spirit of the Kingdom.

What a thrilling and adventurous conception of the Church and of Christian discipleship to take to our young people! Too often the Church has seemed to them timorous, hidebound and effete. But this is far too fine a scheme for youth to stand outside of, and allow it, as Henry Drummond said, to be "run by the duffers." It's a job for the manliest of men, and the most devoted of women, and the most modern of both. It is far removed from that sickly sort of other worldliness which sits with upturned eyes while the car of civilization flounders in the bog. It means being real and active citizens in this world and not merely passengers to the next. It does not require that every one be a theologian or a preacher or an ascetic, but something sturdier and more wholesome and robust, for it calls every one who names the name of Christ to be a colonist, doing his bit in this world for the Kingdom that is invisible and eternal, for love of its King and Lord.

That means the Church, of course, as the nerve centre of the colony, its headquarters, its school.

It means worship together, for colonists must meet and talk of their common allegiance, and learn their Lord's will. But it includes these things only as means towards an end, and the end is the true business of the colonist, namely, service; service, which as Toc H's slogan has it, is "the rent we pay for our room on earth." Merely to meet and talk and listen, and do no more than that, isn't colonizing, whatever it may be. We are here, first of all, to get things done in this world in the Kingdom's way, which is Christ's way. And that is so big and comprehensive that it takes in just everything from Foreign Missions and the League of Nations, down through industry, politics, and social reform to a "cup of cold water" and the neighbour next door. There are colonies of the Kingdom enough in England now to transform it into a real country of God in our generation if every Christian man and woman would only realize that they are called to be colonists.

We need to have our imagination fired and our pride stirred. We need a new vision of the Imperium into which we have been enfranchized by our Lord Jesus Christ. We are properly proud of the British Empire and the vision of our heritage which the very words call up. But one trembles for the might and power of such an

Empire, which men can love and serve with such a passion and pride, if it exists only in and for itself, if its own prosperity is its widest horizon and its highest law. Only if those who guide its destinies and do its business are colonists in it for that Eternal Kingdom of God, whose are all the ends of the earth and all nations and classes of men, can its enormous wealth and power and influence be, not only safe, but a blessing to the world. The finest, truest, safest patriot is he who seeks first the Kingdom of God. God send us more such colonists ! May the Lord help us all, whatever our lot or station in life, to be truer colonists of His Kingdom ourselves !

*"It is too much for you to go
up to Jerusalem."*
(I KINGS xii. 28.)

V

TAKING IT EASY

OPPOSITE this text, Dr Parker wrote in his Bible the words "Religion made Easy." And that is just what it was. Leaving out the question of idolatry, it was so much easier for these Jews to turn in to Dan or Bethel than to journey to Jerusalem. But what a down-come for those who called themselves children of Abraham, who, as their records declare, was willing to give his best beloved because it seemed to him that God asked that.

Making things easy is one of the marks of our times. We travel to-day, so to speak, on upholstered seats, with stuffed arm-rests, where our fathers sat upright and austere on bare boards. That is true in nearly every direction. In education, for instance, how many helps there are along the road to learning nowadays! And it is a splendid thing that the chance of a decent education should be within reach of the poorest. But one wonders whether all this grandmotherly providing is turning out as good a type of men

and women. It's possible to lose, rather than gain, by getting a thing too easily. Beekeepers say that when a certain moth attacks the wax in the comb, so that the young bees get out into the world without the usual struggle, their wings are useless, and they soon die.

This spirit has invaded Religion also. It is a common complaint that if you want members to undertake duties for the Church involving sacrifice of time or regularity of attention, you have the greatest difficulty in getting them. The late Ian Maclaren was no sour fanatic, yet from his own experience he makes this statement : " There is no clerk in a dry-goods store dare treat his duty as lightly as some of the voluntary officers of the Christian Church. They will absent themselves without leave and without excuse, they will never inquire how their work is being done, or whether it is being done at all. They will place their pleasures and their fancies and their social engagements and their imaginary ailments before their Christian duty. And it would be difficult to say how little must be the burden, how short must be the time that they would be willing to count an obligation upon them, and would be prepared to face."

The question is, however, if the Christian religion, truly conceived, has ever been, or can

be easy even in its outward expressions. No one who looks at the Spirit and Teaching of Christ can have much doubt. He was at pains to declare that religion had a cost. He spoke of it as a hard thing. It was, He saw, the taking up of a cross. He warned those who seemed to Him to underrate its hardships and the heroism required of His disciples. Religion for Jesus meant above all things, love, love to God and love to man, and love's royal word is never How little? but rather How much?

Listen to Paul telling what the service of Christ meant to him: "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in cold and nakedness." Try to imagine what Paul would have said had it been suggested to him that that was too much, or if some dapper Jeroboam had sought to persuade him to take a more common-sense view of the situation! When Mary broke her alabaster box at the Saviour's feet, it was the common-sense view that Judas took, when he asked, "Why was this waste of the ointment made?" There are situations too high and fine

for common sense to understand or judge. And one such is the abundant self-forgetfulness of a great and passionate devotion. It was that that Mary had for Christ. It was that our fathers had for their Church, and the sacrifices they made for it abash us as we read of them. But these were a measure, which even common sense might grasp, of how much they loved it.

But this was not the end of Religion in Israel. For all that the people had fallen so low that Jeroboam's arm-chair worship quite satisfied them, better times were to come again under new conditions. There was the Exile to come, and its restoration of a purer, more earnest worship than Israel had ever known. Isaiah was to come. The New Testament was to come. Christ was still to come.

Just as vegetation dies down periodically to a few buds and withered stalks, so does Religion in history seem at times to die down. But Spring and Revival come again.

“ For, like a child sent with a fluttering light,
To feel his way across a gusty night,
Man walks this world.
Again and yet again
The lamp shall be by fits of passion slain ;
But shall not He who sent him from the door
Re-light the lamp once more, and yet once more ? ”

Shall He not? He has done it again and again. And as sure as God is in His Heaven, and Man has an eternal and ineffaceable need of Him, He will do it again.

Meantime, it is the faithful to-day who are the seed out of which the next flowering-time will come. It is through the loyal remnant, and never through the indifferent masses, that the line of evolution in God's Kingdom has always run. If the Church of Christ as at present organized is to disappear and a new and better form to take its place, let all of us at least who love our Church remain steadfast till our guard is relieved. It will last your time and mine, and by the time our grandchildren have discovered a better one, we shall have been discharged of our trust. Meantime, her greatest need, in all her too-many branches and divisions, is the staunch unswerving loyalty of her friends.

"We are fools for Christ's sake."

(I COR. iv. 10.)

VI

CHRIST'S FOOLS

WHEN Saul the Pharisee, bidding fair to be one of the distinguished Rabbis of the day, became Paul the disciple and bondservant of the Nazarene, he was, by every canon of worldly prudence, doing a very foolish thing indeed. He was, in fact, throwing away his whole career.

Paul himself was abundantly content, of course. He knew that by becoming Christ's bondsman he had gained infinitely more than he had lost. It is not Paul's estimate, however, that is in question, but the world's. Paul knew that he was not a fool, but he also knew right well that the world counted him one. And it did not surprise him in the least that it should. Being what he was, and doing as he did, for love of the Christ who had taken him captive once and for all, it was inevitable, he reasoned, that he should generally be regarded as a crank and a fool. With frank and fearless gaze he recognized the difference of standard between the Christian way of life and the world's. And

Christ's way was his deliberate, passionate, thankful choice.

It would save those of us who profess and call ourselves Christians a great deal of unnecessary heart-burning, if we recognized, as frankly, that there are the two standards, Christ's and the world's, and no man is going to win high marks under both. If you cast your eye back over history and think of the biggest Christian men you know, you will find that one and all of them cut but a poor figure, to begin with at least, in the esteem of the world. It never has been a popular thing, still less a profitable thing according to visible standards, to be a devoted servant and follower of Jesus Christ. Men like Wesley and Carey, Wilberforce and Booth, were made to feel in all sorts of ways that they were regarded by the great unthinking majority, whose judgment is styled public opinion, with pity if not with contempt. They cheerfully paid their price for following what they believed to be the will of Christ for them. But it *was* a price. Whatever it may be, in generations to come, it has not been the world's way up till now, to acclaim as the truly wise men those who follow conscience at a cost, and dare to stand alone in obedience to an inner vision. Its label for them, more or less politely, is fools. And though names like Wesley's

or Booth's are held in honour now, by everybody who wants to be considered enlightened, there are other men on other fields whom the world is putting through the same martyrdom to-day. For all the centuries that have passed, the world is still the world, and, though it is a better world, it is still miles apart from the ideal of Christ.

And those who have pledged themselves to the ideal of Christ and are trying to make their lives count for His Kingdom need not be dismayed to find that the world has very little help to give them along that way. Sooner or later the roads fork. The ideals are different. It would be well for every humblest worker among us to recognize the fact quite frankly, and be content. To his own Master, he standeth or falleth. And it was His deliberate judgment that "ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

Why should any one want to teach a Sunday School class? Why should a business man, after a hard day in his own office, spend hours in the service of his Church? Why should a young man give up every night in his week to instilling Christian manliness into a company of boys? There is no doubt you, who do this, are fools; some of you, God be thanked, are big fools! But it is for Christ's sake, and, I take it, you are content—and something more.

But, of course, Christianity is not to be held responsible for every species of fad or eccentricity that calls itself Christian. There is such a thing as manifest unwisdom and behaving like a fool even according to Christian standards. Yet it is probably more necessary for most of us to look at the matter from the other side, and recognize that if we are never conscious that the world's way and its standards of value are not ours, if there is never any clash, or fork in the road at all, then it is seriously to be questioned whether we have even begun to understand what Christian discipleship means.

We look for success in our work and witness, and we pray for it. And that is right. But let us be quite clear what we mean by success. More of the world's notice, its patronage and good opinion, a bigger space in the newspapers?

"We are fools for Christ's sake." That was success for St Paul. And what was Jesus Christ's success? It was not popularity, nor the world's esteem, nor an easy, comfortable time. It was spending and being spent. It was giving Himself in love and utmost service that God's world might at long last be won to Him. And your reward for following Him is that you become Christ's fool. That is reward and glory and honour enough for any man, meantime. Meantime—for

the end is not yet. There is a foolishness of God that is wiser than men, and a weakness of God that is stronger than men. And even now, it has long been beyond question that it is the "fools for Christ's sake" who are the salt of the earth.

“To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

(LUKE 1. 79.)

VII

GUIDE POSTS ON THE WAY TO PEACE

OUR theme is the ideal of living set forth in those beautiful words of Dr H. van Dyke's :

“ To be glad of life because it gives you the chance to love and to work and to play and to look up at the stars ; to be satisfied with your possessions, but not contented with yourself till you have made the best of them ; to despise nothing in the world except falsehood and meanness, and to fear nothing except cowardice ; to be governed by your admirations rather than by your disgusts ; to covet nothing that is your neighbour's except his kindness of heart and gentleness of manner ; to think seldom of your enemies, often of your friends, and every day of Christ ; and to spend as much time as you can with body and with spirit in God's out-of-doors —these are little guide-posts on the footpath to peace.”

In these words the white blessing of peace is split up, like light in a prism, into its seven com-

ponent colours. Some of them may appeal to you more than others, but they are all worth looking at.

First, there is a certain way of regarding life. It is to believe that life is worth living because it gives you the chance to love. That is what life is for, our chance of the prize of learning love, as the poet reminds us. Because, in sober fact, love is the last and biggest thing in life. It is the most beautiful and truest name for God. The more deeply you love God and man and your own beloved, the further you penetrate into the secret of Peace. And work. Nobody of course knows peace of mind who is idle. And play? Why not? We thank God for our chance to work. Let us thank Him too for the play that makes us eager and ready to work again. Now fit that picture of life into its large frame, and look up at the stars! "Every day," said Richter, "should close with a look at the stars."

The second primary colour in the white light of peace is contentment. Be satisfied with your possessions. Your possessions do not, I think, mean your house, business, money and so on. You do not own these things, you only have them on loan. Possessions are what you really own as part of yourself, your faculties, health,

temperament, talents, gifts, capacities. These are the things you cannot exchange for any one else's, much as you would sometimes like to. Well, be satisfied, be content to have it so. You cannot make a better of it, and if peace is to be found by you, it is within the limits of these particular abilities and disabilities of yours. Be satisfied with what you have got from the great, all-wise, all-loving Father. But—for there is more to be said—not content till you have made the best of what you have got. It is certainly true, however little you may have to begin with, that the most you can make of that is a very great deal, much more than you have made yet.

Third. There are two pieces of luggage that have to be left behind if you would find peace, namely, contempt and fear. About contempt, we hardly need to speak. For who are you, and who am I, that we should despise anybody or anything except what is mean and false, in ourselves and in others? But many people do need to be told that one of the guide-posts on the way to peace is "Fear not!" Fear nothing. Nothing, mark you. Neither death nor life, nor sorrow nor pain nor dishonour. Why should you be afraid? Every moment you are in God's hands, and He is our Father. Whatever comes to you,

He makes no mistakes, and no harm can come to you. You may have to wince with the pain of things. One day you may have to weep. But you never need to fear.

Fourth. Be governed by your admirations rather than your disgusts. That is simple, and speaks for itself. Follow your admirations, seek and concern yourself with the things you admire, what is pure and lovely and of good report, and you don't need to trouble about what disgusts you. Your road will not lie past that.

The fifth primary colour on our scale is green, I think, because it has to do with envy. The covetous man or woman is perpetually disquieted. For such, peace is a sheer impossibility. Covet nothing that is your neighbour's except his kindness of heart and gentleness of manner. And that, of course, is not envy at all.

Number six is most important. Think seldom of your enemies and often of your friends. Most of us reverse the process, and think too much of our "enemies" so called, and too little of our friends. For thinking about our friends brings them in spirit into our secret chamber where they leave their blessing like a fragrance ere they depart. Seldom of your enemies, often of your friends, and every day of Christ. Is that not a worthy purpose? It seems a pity to seek to

enlarge it. Let us rather bow our heads, and make our prayer—"O Christ, our Saviour, our Lord, our Master and our Friend, bring us every day into conscious fellowship with Thee. Touch us to remembrance when we are forgetful, and grant that as we remember Thee in love and loyalty, we may grow day by day in Thy likeness. For Thy Name's sake. Amen."

The last injunction points us to God's out-of-doors. Tolstoi once said that one of the rules for peace of mind is not to break the link between you and Nature. And it is true wisdom. Man made the house, the office, the workshop, but the open air is God's own. Let us be thankful for the benediction of God's out-of-doors and seek it as often as we can. City dwellers as we are, bodily enjoyment of the hills and the sea is not always possible, though we may always have the open air. Therefore we should cherish all that suggests the out-of-doors world in book or poem or picture, and everything that breathes its spirit. For its spirit is God's. Nature does not, cannot speak to us of goodness or mercy—for these we have to look elsewhere—but it can and does pronounce upon us a benediction of peace.

Let us try to direct our lives by such guide-posts as these. And may the Lord our God,

whose blessing alone can prosper us, guide us more and more into such knowledge and experience of this, His Blessing, as may in this life be most expedient for us and, when our life is done, bring us

“To where, beyond these voices, there is Peace.”

*“When I consider Thy
heavens, . . . what is man, that
Thou art mindful of him ?”*
(PSALM viii. 3, 4.)

VIII

WHAT IS MAN ?

THE modern man asks the same question as the Psalmist, but with a tenfold greater intensity, for, compared with his knowledge of the heavenly bodies, the Psalmist's was that of a five-year-old child.

At school or after, he hears or reads that the sun, which is more than a million times larger than our earth, is 93 million miles distant, and light, travelling at 186,000 miles a second, takes about eight minutes to come. And then he is told that our sun is only one star after all, and that a small one, among a wilderness of stars, millions of them, some of them so far away that light, which comes from the sun in eight minutes, takes thousands and thousands of years to come from them. And his spirit, as Richter says, “acheth at this infinity.” What is man, he asks, and what is man's little world in all this ? If it and all on it were wiped out, it would mean no more to the Universe than if in some vast forest a single leaf fell from one

tree ! And an indescribable awe descends upon his spirit.

In part that awe is good, if it silences the glib and facile dogmatism, and breathes a more utter reverence into our thought and speech about God. But chiefly it is paralysing. Nothing seems to matter that happens on such a pinpoint world. Is it possible, he asks, to believe in the Christian Gospel in the face of all that ? Can God possibly care ? Was Jesus not deluded too ?

Yet there are famous astronomers to-day who are convinced disciples of Jesus Christ, so there must be a way back from this paralysis to faith in Him. And we want to try to think our way along that road together.

First, about caring. Has size really anything to do with that ? A mother's house is many thousands of times bigger than her child, but she cares most for him all the same. And motherhood and fatherhood are our best human standards of what God is.

Then Science, having awed us to silence with its telescope, hands us a microscope, and we are thrilled and awed once more—this time, by the wonder of the infinitesimally little. We see that there is a whole Universe of mystery and care under our feet as well as over our heads. Jesus

Himself made this very point, for He asked man to consider the lilies of the field, the blades of grass, the sparrow that falleth to the ground, reminding him that God is in all these. Very modern and recent science goes further along this line, and asks us to believe that every atom of matter contains within itself a whole stellar system of "inconceivably minute points of electric energy moving in orbits like the stars and with a speed that equals theirs." The wonder of the heavens, in fact, reproduced in every atom of matter!

And aren't we forgetting, in all this, that these wonders of the heavens and atomic structure exist in the mind of man? It is his mind that has computed the path of the stars, and grasped the greatness and the littleness of God. Man and man alone, apparently, is capable of "thinking God's thoughts after Him." He can count the stars. They cannot count themselves. And therefore, by reason of his mind, he is greater by far than they.

If this is true of man as possessing a mind, how much more true is it of him as a moral being! By universal consent the moral takes precedence of the mental. Goodness is a greater thing than power, and belongs to a higher order of being. "An honest man," as the poet reminds us, "is

the noblest work of God." And this, again, is Christ's own point: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

For God also, therefore, moral values must be greater than material ones, and a human soul more to Him than a planet. Great as are God's works in the material universe, His moral attributes must be as great. The Psalmist's argument is thoroughly sound—"as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards them that fear Him." *So great.* That must be so.

Now, in this Kingdom of moral values, you have not far to go before you come upon Jesus Christ. For it is not merely Copernican astronomy that has happened since this Psalmist wrote—Jesus has also happened, has become a fact of history, and, for us, a part of the Universe of God. And in that Kingdom He reigns supreme. Before the spirit of the crucified, forgiving, redeeming Christ, all men who have eyes to see and a heart to understand, bow their heads in reverent homage and adoring gratitude. In all the Universe, material or spiritual, the Cross of Christ is where God is most movingly and clearly to be seen.

And not God only, but man also. Ask the

Psalmist's question, with the Cross before your eyes, and it becomes "what is man that Thou visitest him so, and art mindful of him at that great cost?" And the answer comes from the Gospel which the wilderness of stars has not displaced, the answer drifts down on man's spirit, weary with thinking of the immensities: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." It is wonderful but not incredible. You may be an astronomer, finding God in the vast starry spaces, yet seeing His supreme glory in the face of Jesus Christ. In your own experience you know that God has visited you in Jesus Christ, and been mindful even of you. And the thought of God's millions of stars in the depths of space, as it cannot take that knowledge from you, only makes you the more exalt and magnify His marvellous grace. And that, after all, is just what the Psalmist is doing.

But suppose, asks somebody for a last question, that there are other worlds with self-conscious and God-conscious beings on them? Well, we can suppose it. But what can we know or say of it, save that, if so, God will somehow make Himself known to them also? If He is Father, He both needs and longs for the confidence and the love of all His children everywhere. How, on other worlds, He may win His children to Himself,

we cannot know or tell, for He is God Almighty, and we are but the creatures of a day, seeing through a glass darkly. He may have other words for other worlds,

“But, for this world, the word of God is Christ.”

Blessed be His Name. Amen.

“They gathered it every morning.”

(EXOD. xvi. 21.)

IX

THE ANCIENT LAW OF THE MANNA

EACH man, according to the story, got enough for his own use, but when from laziness or avarice he tried to hoard the gift, to make a “corner in manna,” God touched it with His curse and it bred worms. That is the law of the Manna. And it is still God’s word to us. We, too, get our manna from God every day, and this ancient scripture holds a warning as to how we are not to use it.

Most of us, save at odd times, are very blind to one of the plainest facts of life, namely, that it is a huge and silent conspiracy into which we have been drawn, where we do little else but hold out our hands and get them filled. Almost everything that makes life fair and happy and fruitful just comes to us, as the morning light comes, from a Beneficence about us.

To what, for instance, did the Great Conspirator bring you back this morning from the nightly adventure of sleep? To health and hope and the full use of your faculties, to your place in society,

to all that the past has stored for you and taught you, to your home and the love of your beloved. How much of all that is of your own providing ? Haven't you got the most of it, as the children of Israel got their manna ?

Yet I fear we are becoming less and less mindful of that fact. One notices, for example, that in a good many homes nowadays we are in too big a hurry to give thanks before meat. Now, I am not asserting that a man can't be thankful without saying his Grace aloud. And there is undoubtedly something a trifle oppressive in that extreme piety which gives audible thanks for every casual cup of coffee. But is it not a woeful blindness to a very obvious fact when a whole family gathers day after day around their table, and no one speaks a word of mindful thanks to God ?

We thank our friends for a kindness, but we forget that we owe thanks somewhere, also, for our friends. We speak of "making" friends, but the truth is that we get them. They are part of the unearned increment of life. Where have they come from ? What have I done to deserve them ? And chiefly what am I to do with the gifts—the sympathy, good cheer and happiness—which they leave every day on my doorstep ?

Bagshot, in a quaint passage, tries to calculate the chances, if he were born over again, of coming again into the comforts and privileges of such a home as his in civilized and Christian England. The odds, he declares, are very strong that, next time, he would have been born a Chinaman or a Hindu or a negro ! But we take all these privileges and liberties for granted, and never think that it is by no merit of our own that we inherit them. Yet what more right have we to these boons and advantages than others of God's children in dark and benighted places whose heritage has been so very different ? What have *you* got them for ? Did you ever ask what God means you to do with them ?

If you do, you will find an answer away back in the desert where the Manna fell. God means us to share these bounties. He does not mean us to hug them to ourselves in a selfish exultation. You know what happened to the manna that was hoarded ? It went bad. And that is God's law still. It's a dangerous thing to let too much blessing remain in your own hands. The safe plan is to pay it away quickly in some fashion, to share it somehow with others. Else it will go wrong on your hands, and you will go wrong too. Have you never seen God's mildew creep over the selfish, self-centred life—how the horizon con-

tracts, and the complaints increase, and friends grow strangely forgetful, and happiness takes wings, and life becomes flat and stale? The gift of life, hoarded and unshared, has gone bad. You know what happens to the pond that has no outlet—it grows green and stagnant and sickly. Now, God is brimming His gifts every day into your life and mine. Is there an outlet anywhere, into other lives more needy? Woe betide us if there be not!

God has not given you comfort or culture or privilege that your life may be like a fountain in a park at which thirsty children peer through the railings. Your thanks to God may be sincere enough, but they do not count for much if you are forgetting that you have brethren who have none of the things that you thank God for. You are prosperous and happy that you may remember those who are not. Your own clean, bright, and perhaps spacious home is God's daily reminder to you that there are men and women and children in this City who are slowly dying of dirt and foul air. There is a law of God which allows no man an absolute ownership in the gifts and blessings He bestows upon us. We are stewards, nothing more. And of the manner in which we have used what He has lent us, we shall one day have to give account.

“ Have you had a kindness shown ?
 Pass it on !
’Twas not given for thee alone,
 Pass it on !
Let it travel down the years,
Let it dry another’s tears,
Till in Heaven the deed appears,
 Pass it on ! ”

That is the ancient law of the Manna, and, what is more to the point for us, it is also the new Law of Love that we may learn from Jesus Christ.

"And the angel of the Lord said unto Gideon, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour."

(JUDGES vi. 12.)

X

THE SERVICE OF THE UNFIT

IT sounds like sarcasm, for Gideon was threshing corn by the wine press to hide it and himself from the Midianites, who had harried and despoiled his country for seven years. Israel had lost heart and hope. It seemed as if God had forgotten them. To Gideon, also, the future was as dark as to any. But he saw a little heap of corn that had to be threshed if he and his were to live at all. And as he went out to that duty, the old story tells that an angel met him, with a blessing on his brave heart.

So it is not sarcasm. God's brave man is he, who, whatever be the doubt or the darkness, faces up to the duty of the hour. The God Gideon could not see, and had almost lost hope of, met him beside the plain drab duty he went out to do. Duty may be, as Wordsworth says, a "stern daughter of the Voice of God," but what we need to learn to-day both in Church and State is that she *is* a daughter, that God and Duty belong together. There is plenty of talk in our time,

and more than enough of theory, but "the verdict to be striven for is not 'Well guessed' but 'Well done.'"

And this stern face of Duty has its gracious evangelical side. As many a man has found, it is often the divinely appointed road out of our worst besetments and doubts. When life is one huge point of interrogation, your simple clear duty at the moment is a shelter from the Universe. You are safe there, you are on the right road there, whatever the darkness be. And the angel of the God you are vainly seeking will, haply, show himself there to you, will certainly be there with you, whether you know it or not.

Do you remember how, when Peter had lost his Lord, and everything was bleak and hopeless, he suddenly squared his shoulders and said, "I go a-fishing?" That was Duty, his daily darg, that, at any rate, had to be done. And the lovely Gospel story tells how it was just there, as he did his duty, that Peter's Lord came to him again, and gave him back more than his old hope and joy. There is no man's case hopeless who still hears some clear duty calling him. Yes, and even when all else has gone, and only that stands between him and absolute surrender, it is through that duty, loyally done, that faith and hope and the things .

unseen and eternal will come back to him again in nobler form than before.

It is clear that the choice of God had fallen on Gideon to deliver his nation from this Midianite tyranny. Yet, look at him ! He shrinks from the task. He has no confidence in himself, or his fitness for such a commission. "O, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel ? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." Yet it is this diffident, self-distrustful soul that God lighted upon to be the saviour of his people. That upsets some of our ideas. We talk about the survival of the fittest. But this man proclaims his unfitness. And again and again in the Bible you hear that same note. Moses protests that he cannot speak, and "who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh ?" Jeremiah, summoned to be a prophet of the most high God, can only plead, "Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak, for I am but a child."

There is nothing of the strong silent man of popular fiction about these leaders, with his serene self-confidence and his sense of perfect adequacy for anything that can turn up. When God chooses men, it is often the most unlikely instruments that He lights upon. Blessed, said Jesus, are the poor in spirit, the humble-minded, who have no great idea of themselves, for theirs is

the Kingdom of Heaven. And the reason seems to be that in that kingdom a man does not radiate force, he simply transmits it, he is not a source, but only a channel. It may be that God chooses the "unfit" so often because they are the more willing channels of His grace, because their very sense of unfitness compels them the more constantly to depend on God.

If God is calling you, these days, to some service for Him, and it is your sense of unfitness that is holding you back, learn from this ancient page of Scripture that God knows better than you the kind of servant that He needs, and that His call not only signifies that He needs you, and not another, but entitles you to assume that He will see you through. Almighty God can do without self-sufficient people. Those whom He calls, He can make fit. For He sends no man a warfare on his own charges.

But that is not the worst. Gideon is not only unfit in his own eyes. He is a confessed doubter. He has lost his faith in the presence of God. Listen to him: "O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all the miracles which our fathers told us of? But now, the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." Gideon is frankly unable to square the facts of life with the

faith of his fathers. He can see God in their past, but in this new world everything has been shaken, and he speaks like a man whose faith is on the point of slipping entirely from him. Yet it is to this perplexed and hopeless soul that an angel comes with a special commission from God ! It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

But hasn't it all a very modern sound ? And isn't it glorious encouragement for all Gideon's brethren to-day, in this new world, in which some of the old doctrines don't seem to fit as they used ? Young people to-day find themselves beset by questions that their grandfathers never dreamed of, and too often they get the impression that there is no room or work in the Kingdom of Christ for restless questioning modern minds. And it is such a delusion !

With this page open before us, let us tell young Gideon of to-day, with his new Science and new Psychology, and his new view of Scripture that is changing the whole face of truth for him, that Jesus Christ needs him and wants him just as he is. Here, in this ancient Scripture, is a Modernist of the Old Testament called and used and honoured of God.

Whether, in the American sense, you are a Fundamentalist or a Modernist, matters very

little for personal religion. The thing that really matters when the call of Christ is in a man's heart is Will you? He wants you. He needs you. And you know that you need Him. Will you be His man, in this world of His, to-day? The really important things in life can never be matters of opinion or intellectual preference, but questions of personal choice and aim and endeavour. And for even the most modern of Gideons the supreme question is what is the will of God for me? What does God mean me to do with this life He has given me? That is the question. And there is no answer for that to be found anywhere which is for a moment to be compared with the answer that a man finds, and that any man may find, in the fellowship of Jesus Christ.

"Ye are the salt of the earth."
(MATT. V. 13.)

XI

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

WHAT did Jesus mean by these words? Surely not that the Christian is to regard himself as a mere preservative. The ordinary, everyday use of salt is not for preservative or antiseptic purposes, but to season food, to make it wholesome and palatable, to give it zest, piquancy, relish. So what the words suggest¹ is not so much the self-satisfied ideal of the Christian man saving God's world from corruption, but the much more entrancing idea that the disciples of Jesus are in this world to add to the zest and joy of life, to make it wholesome and interesting for others, because it is, for themselves to begin with, such a joyous and endlessly fascinating gift. Have salt in yourselves, said Jesus. Jesus meant His disciples to find life abundantly worth while, and to make it so for others. It may be hard or sorrowful at times, but never dull or insipid. There is salt in it.

¹ *Expository Times*, 35, 136.

He claimed to confer on men the gift of life more abundant. Life, in His Spirit and fellowship, is the life radiant, supervitalized. He Himself met all its challenge with a glad and cheerful Yes. In Him, as it is quaintly said in one of the Epistles, was Yea. He did not go about saying No to life. He took it on, whatever it was, and moulded it to the ends of God and of the Kingdom. Life divine, whose source was in God, welled up in Him and tingled out to every needy soul within reach. To be in His presence was to know the Power of God. To touch but the hem of His garment was health and joy and peace.

And as He was, His first disciples were. We do not realize as we should how the New Testament simply thrills and bubbles with vitality. It is the most joyous book in the world. For these men, whose praise of Christ is so soaring and lyrical that we cannot use their words without shame of face, the life in Christ was the very greatest of adventures, a sheer romance, the wonder of which they could only describe in negatives—eye hath not seen or ear heard—it doth not yet appear what we shall be. And that was just what Jesus apparently expected. To Him it seemed a most natural thing that the man who had found the Pearl of price should “for

joy thereof go and sell all that he had and buy that field."

But when you turn from that to us average Christian men and women to-day, how flat and tasteless our discipleship appears. For many, the religious life is a pedestrian affair, just a dogged going-on from day to day. Relish, sparkle, piquancy, where shall we find them? "But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" One of the commonest ideas about religion to-day is that it is a device for making some of the bright things in life dull. It is not salt, it's a blanket. Instead of being a power-house, the Church to-day has the reputation of being merely a shelter, or an infirmary.

That so many of us are feverishly seeking pleasure to-day, and new and ever new forms and varieties of it, like high-spiced sauces to whet our appetite for living, is a tacit confession that we have no salt in ourselves. The really healthy person can make a meal, if need be, off bread and water with a relish. He brings his sauce to the table with him. It is in himself. And that is what Jesus clearly expected His disciples would find. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." It was said of Gladstone by Lord Morley that "he lived from a great depth of being." So should all

Christ's people live, and joyously withal, having a well-spring of joy in themselves, if they believe in Him.

That God is our Father in Heaven, and this world is His, and our lives are in His hands, that our sins are forgiven, and that beyond this life there is a better—if that, which is the message of Jesus, is true, there is simply nothing that is too good to be believed. For those who accept that Gospel, life ought never to be flat or stale. On the contrary, there must always be a tang and zest about it. For such it is “a blessed thing to be alive.” And because they find life, in the faith of Jesus, so endlessly fascinating, full of wonder, full of God, they make it interesting and happy, good and godlike for others.

Do you feel that there is something self-satisfied even yet about the ideal so stated? Ah, but you have not thought out the Master's figure, after all, if you suppose so. For what does the salt do but lose itself in the dish? When you can *taste* the salt, there is something wrong. What you say when the salt has accomplished its mission, has spread itself, forgotten itself and disappeared, is “How pleasant this *dish* is, how wholesome and palatable and just what it ought to be!” When we Christian men and women live in the world as Christ meant us, and will teach us, to live,

it is not of us that those about us will speak, but of life as they see it and find it, and the glory of God the Father. For it is salt's perfect work to add zest and interest, and yet remain unnoticed. "And ye are the salt of the earth."

"To him that is ready to faint, kindness is due from his friend, even to him that is forsaking the fear of the Almighty."
(JOB vi. 14.)

XII

THE UNFAILING BALM OF KINDNESS

ELIPHAZ drew near to comfort Job in his sore trouble, and the speech he made is an able one, full of analogies most skilfully handled. But the absence of one thing reduces it all to a solemn futility. That thing was kindness, an assurance to Job that his friend really felt for him. There is doctrine in the discourse, in plenty, but there is no brotherly kindness in it, and that damns it in Job's eyes altogether. It hurt Job exceedingly. The cold theological assumption that he was a sinner being punished for his sins, maddened him and called out the retort of our text. It is a magnificent answer, centuries ahead of its time. It is one of the great sayings of the Old Testament, with something in it of augury of the New.

Job says that he expected a deeper sense of what he was suffering, and a more sympathetic and human way of dealing with him. The very animals, he pointed out, do not cry out unless they are hurt. "Doth the wild ass bray when it hath grass?" No. Well, I would not cry like

this unless I were in pain, and you might have judged of my suffering by the state in which you find me.

This is surely written for our learning. For those who take upon themselves the office of Comforter, these are indispensable qualities—insight and sympathy. It would undoubtedly be a great thing, as Robert Burns said, to see ourselves as others see us. But the benefit would only be personal. There is another power even more to be coveted than that, and likely to be far more useful, the power to see others as they see themselves, to be able to appreciate something of what they feel, to feel with them, or, as the Greek is, to *sympathize*. To intrude upon any person in trouble in any other spirit is too much like an experiment in vivisection. Had Eliphaz felt truly for his friend Job he would have found something better to do than framing a doctrine to fit his case. When the wound is raw, and the stroke newly fallen, it is sometimes torture to let even the finger of sympathy touch it, and the truest kindness would sometimes seem to leave it alone, to speak no word, even of audible prayer, that would hurt. What one in that state feels when Eliphaz drops in to condole, probably only Job could tell.

What Job missed most in his friend's attitude

was kindness. And that is the dumb appeal of all trouble or sorrow that turns to us at all. It is such a radical misapprehension to think that unless we can explain, or justify the ways of God to him, our friend must go comfortless. Why then is God's Holy Spirit called the Comforter? It is His office to bring peace to the afflicted and to bind up the broken heart. He knows the Why. He loves infinitely more than we can, or than we know. What then, you ask, remains for us to do—nothing?

Ah, no, ours is it to show kindness. God can comfort His children without us. But He cannot show them the kindness He would without us. The mystery is as dark to us as to the sufferer himself. We may not help him there. But first, last, and all the time, we can be kind. Sometimes it is true kindness to speak of the love of God, if we can, and the tender understanding fellowship of Jesus, if that is known to us; and again, it seems kindest not to speak at all. And if only behind the speech or the silence there be the heart that truly feels and pities, our friend will be helped far beyond our knowing.

Have we ourselves not been thankful for a kindly visit, even when the words were halting and the manner perhaps awkward? That did not matter in the least, for it was the kindness

shining through that helped and healed. These are the things a man may do for his brother ; for the rest, it lies between a man and his God. When we take on us the part of Eliphaz (and when it is rightly done, there is no worthier ministry), let us remember that God Himself is dealing directly with our brother, and purposes to comfort and teach him far, far more than we know or can do. But he looks to us for love, sympathy, kindness. If we fail in that, we fail completely and add but bitterness to his grief, though we speak with the tongues of men and angels.

You have noticed, perhaps, that there is more in our text than that. "Even to him," said poor Job, "even to him that is forsaking the fear of the Almighty." Job speaks as if he were in danger of giving up his faith. And what do you think this miserable, doubt-beset mortal asked of his friend ? Arguments to buttress his faith ? Discourses on the perils of unbelief ? No, but just kindness ! The way to treat the man who is drifting from his moorings of faith is to show him kindness, said Job. Be patient with his wild words and his wrong ideas. He is not crying out so for nothing. Something is hurting him. If that advice had been followed by the Church of Christ, how much of its history would have been different ! Souls in doubt have been scorned or

cursed, banished and put to death, when they should have been gathered to the heart of Mother Church with as much pity and tenderness as the sorrowing and the afflicted. What a prescription this is for the way to treat the man you count a heretic, who is not, as you think, "sound." Whatever else you do or say, show him kindness.

When we would fain help our brother, whose home, whose life, or whose faith is shadowed, and we feel baffled and impotent and know not how best to serve him, let Job's protest come to our aid. He was an expert in sorrow, and he knew. Our words may be poor and halting, our silence may cover a sheer inability to find anything to say. But kindness is a sure balm, and will find its own way to the hurt. For speech may fail, and silence may be a blunder, but kindness, love, charity never faileth.

*“Son, thou art ever with me,
and all that I have is thine.”*
(LUKE XV. 31.)

XIII

THE FATHER'S RESOURCES

IN His picture of the father in this story of the Prodigal, Jesus is revealing His thought about God, what He is like, what His attitude is to His children, even to such an unamiable one as the Elder Brother. He contrasts this prudent and mercenary son, clutching all he can for himself, niggardly even of pity and forgiveness, with the father, entreating that unlovable fellow to realize that all that he has is his ! That is Jesus' inner thought of what God is like. That was the image of the Father in Heaven that lay always in Jesus' heart—a God who puts all He has into our lap, and says : Use as much as ever you can, it is all for you. Is that how *we* think of God ? If He is as willing and gracious as that, have we, as yet, made a much better use of the offer than the elder brother in the story did ?

Riches that we have not yet possessed, riches we have not even tried to measure, so little do we trust the Father's good will ! What a thought that is for the hours when we take stock of our-

selves ! The *peace* of God, for example—an uncharted ocean of it, passing all understanding, and He wants our lives to be filled full. The *power* of God, so that in every service and every need we are partners with Omnipotence, and can have all that we require. The riches of His *grace*, to forgive, to heal, to meet temptation, for health and sickness, for home and business, for the critical hours and for every day. There is no limit to what God's grace can do. And Jesus says that God bends over us like a father, with all that in His hands, and says : " Son, thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is thine." What a picture of God ! God longing to give, to give the best, to give all that He has ! And what a disappointment you and I must be to Him that we seek so little at His hands.

But Jesus, in this story, is not only revealing His knowledge of God. By His whole life and by His death He embodies it. It is, in a supreme fashion, through Jesus Christ that God the Father is saying to you and me and all men : All that I have is yours !

In a tenderly human and intimate way, the Apostle Paul, summing up all the Father's goodness, says that He " spared not His own Son." He was willing to give even Him. And when He was found on earth, a man among men, that was

still the divinest thing about Him, that there was no gift or power of His, no vision of truth or of God, no love of His heart or utmost service of which He was capable, that He did not continually pour out on His friends or seek to share with them. The mark of the Lord Jesus was just that He was always giving. He was the incarnate Word of God saying to all who would listen: All that I have is thine.

So sure was Jesus that the Father was ready to give Himself in any worthy, needful gift to any of His children, that He said: You have only to ask, you have only to knock, for the Father is waiting to open the door. And what surprised Him was, not that men presumed upon this eager, loving willingness of God, but that they, for the most part, ignored it. Hitherto, He said, with something of the accent of the father in His own story, "hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name."

The ministry of Jesus was all giving. There was a red thread through it all. And there came a day when He saw clearly that, in their blindness and hatred of Him, who had never done anything but give to men, His enemies were going to ask His life itself. Long, long before this, any one but Jesus would have turned back from this hard cruel road that Love was taking Him.

Almighty God, who for Love's sake is sometimes hard on men, is hardest of all upon Himself. For Jesus went all the way, and gave Himself at last. And, though we cannot limit God by such words, it seems as if He were saying to us, of His gift of Jesus, crowned as it was with a Cross: All that I have is thine! It is as if He said: You have got all now; I have nothing more that I can give.

In honour, and in gratitude, some sort of answer lies with us.

“They made light of it.”
(MATT. xxii. 5.)

XIV

LIGHT WEIGHTS

WE are often told that ours is a frivolous age, and there is only too much that could be adduced to support the indictment. It is true that the War accounts for a good deal, and its indirect effects cannot but operate yet awhile. Moralists and preachers need to be specially patient and charitable in judging the generation most affected by it. It is also true, of course, that in every age of the world's history, the younger generation has seemed to the older to be lacking in solidity and seriousness.

Yet when all is said Frivolity is a serious fault. And it is not new. Jesus Christ found it in His time, like a stone wall against which even He beat in vain.

What is it in its essence? Not light-heartedness. Don't let us make that mistake. The play-element is part of the scheme of God's Universe. The people who live on the sunny side of the street and scatter gladness as a rose sheds its perfume are a gift of God to the com-

munity. Homes can be light-hearted and full of laughter, and yet have their foundations deep laid in the reverence and love of God and of all things worthy and of good report. The day when to confess Christ meant to be sour-faced and gloomy is past, thank God, and we have inherited a more gracious tradition. Frivolity is not light-heartedness.

It is much more akin to ingratitude. The men in the parable who made light of the King's invitation were his subjects, bound to him by strong ties, and owing him much. And in that mesh of obligation we are all caught, whether we will or no. We are all almoners on the bounty of others. How infinitely indebted we are, for instance, to the homes that have sheltered us and made us what we are, and to the love that reigns there. Home has an elementary claim on us. To ignore that, to cheapen its relationships, to slacken its ties is the essence of frivolity, because it is the repression of a natural response.

Religion, likewise, in a broad sense is a recognition of our dependence on God. It is He that hath made us. We are His creatures. Every good gift cometh from Him. And He asks for some response. He sends His invitation to you and me, and God's invitation is Jesus Christ. There is every reason in the world why we should

take that seriously, for we belong to God entirely. It isn't as if He wanted to bore us, to cramp and restrict our lives, to make us gloomy and sad—the very reverse indeed. He desires our company, our gesture of trust and love, as a father covets his son's fellowship and affection. And to treat all that with absolute indifference, as so many do to-day, to turn lightly to our "farm or merchandise," or to the passing pleasure of the moment, without a thought of Him or His invitation, that is frivolity. And in its essence it is failure to honour an obligation.

It is like flinging off an arm on our shoulder, to which we are infinitely indebted, and that means us nothing but further kindness. It is like telling the old father or mother, when we are grown up, that there are many others whose company we prefer to theirs.

But, even more, frivolity is the result of a distorted scale of values. It exalts the wrong thing. It places the supreme emphasis on what is not supremely important. No one denies that pleasure and sport and "having a good time" are legitimate elements in life. But they are not the chief elements. There are other values that are more precious as well as more enduring.

The frivolous person who dawdles through life, merely enjoying himself, never doing a hand's

turn for either God or man, may defend his own standard of values, and resent all criticism. But one thing he cannot do, he cannot set his standard alongside of Christ's, and feel comfortable about it. For, once in history, there has been lived a life which put the first things first, whose standard of values was right, ideal, perfect. And ever since others have been measured by His.

Jesus has showed us, once for all, that the ideal life is the life that is lived towards God the Father in trust and obedience, and towards men in love and service. In fellowship with Him, men have learned that they simply have not time to offer sacrifices at *every* altar by the wayside, but must reserve their utmost for the highest.

In the Christian view of it, life is not a gloomy affair, certainly, but neither is it a perpetual picnic. It is an adventure, earnest, hard at times, but never forlorn. We have our niche to fill, and our work to do, and God to glorify. We have to learn Truth and Wisdom and Patience and Love. We have to serve our day and generation as best we can. To trip through life catching butterflies is a child's game. To pass life's best riches, to miss its chances of doing something for God or man, seeking only enjoyment, thinking only of self, what a life that is ! How bitter its fruit is bound to be ! How com-

plete the disillusionment that must surely come ! How sad and hopeless the awakening ! Let us put it to ourselves as a possibility to be feared. Let us covet the joyous life, by all means, both for ourselves and others. But may the Lord deliver us all, in these vital days, from the sin of frivolity.

“And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see.”
(2 KINGS vi. 17.)

XV

FAITH THAT WORKS

THERE was nothing the matter with this young man's eyes. What was visible he saw quite clearly, too clearly for his peace of mind. He saw the sun glinting on the armour of hordes of Assyrians. He saw their deep lines encompassing the town. And he saw nothing more. And because that was all he saw, he was in despair. Alas, master, what shall we do? Call that want of faith, or spiritual blindness, or materialism, or what you please—it marks the man, and its product, as you can see, is inefficiency.

But when in answer to the prophet's prayer, the young man's eyes were opened, and he saw further, the immediate result was that he became more of a man. Gone were his terrors, and his worthlessness as a combatant, because he had begun to live by the inspiration of faith.

That is one important consequence of living by faith. It heightens your value as a man or woman. You count for more in the world.

You are worth more to your friends, and all who need you. You are more proof against the drifting infections of depression or cowardice. The difference between health and efficiency, and the physical or nervous breakdown, is quite often just the difference that faith in God makes. This Scripture suggests that the prophet's servant was a practical wreck in the face of danger, and quite useless. With faith added—and that was all that was added, for the visible environment remained exactly the same—he was turned into a man, alert, capable, courageous.

We shall surely all agree that the thing that makes that difference, whatever you may call it, is something that is very much worth while. Even if all that you could say about faith is that it makes one a more efficient and happier person, it would deserve our most careful inquiry, to see, for example, whether we possess it, or have as much of it as we might have.

The man's outward circumstances were not changed in the least. Let us emphasize that. I do not understand this story to mean that the man actually saw the horses and chariots of the Lord. He saw them, as our fathers used to put it, "with the eyes of faith." That is to say, it was something new, *which he himself brought to the seeing*, that made all the difference. There

was no change in the landscape, but only in himself. The extra thing he brought with him was the faith, caught from the big-hearted prophet, that God, as a matter of fact, *was* there, as well as the Assyrians.

It is what we take with us to the seeing of life that makes all the difference. For the hard bare facts of life are more or less the same for us all. We are "given" a set of circumstances —such and such a home, a job, a measure of health, a circle of friends. That is the raw material of life. And what we make of it depends on what we bring to the experience of it. One man looks on these facts and finds them almost a nightmare. Another, looking on very much the same set of facts, finds in them an appeal to honour and usefulness, sees gleams of purpose in them, catches glimpses of hope and love in them, and even a vision of God. It is what each brings to the seeing that makes the difference.

If you start out in the morning with the assumption that there is no goodness in human nature that is not purely selfish, you will never see any. But if you elect to assume the nobler hypothesis, what happens? Why, you immediately begin to see the goodness in life, and to see lots of it. You make your own world, in fact,

out of the raw material given to you, by what you bring with you.

So the great question is, what will you bring? What do you think of this for an assumption—that there is a personal God, who loves and cares, who has a plan for His world and for all His children of men—such a God, in fact, as Jesus has revealed; that the spiritual world behind the visible is a real world, by contact with which new power and strength come into our lives. Call it a pure assumption meantime, and take it on trust.

For a mathematical proof of whether you are right or wrong in so doing, you may have to wait till the story is finished, whenever that is. But meantime, working with that assumption is going to make a tremendous difference to you. You will not give up hope when you are beleaguered by frowning circumstances. The glad and happy things in life will mean more to you, and you will look on the other sort without abject terror. If the assumption makes even that difference, isn't it worth while? If you can practically make your own world by what you bring to the interpretation of it, isn't it worth while to make sure that you are bringing the best assumption you can lay hold of? There is no doubt what that is—it is Christian faith.

It is staking everything on the best being true in the end.

But what justifies us, you may say, in making such an assumption? May not the whole thing be a dream? We are up against facts, and we want a fact to build even our assumptions on.

Yes, and such a fact, it seems to me, is the Fact of Christ, the historic Jesus. That at least is not a dream. There actually was a life like His lived on this earth, as the Gospels declare. We may not be sure of one or two of the details, but of the broad Fact there is no doubt.

Where did that blessed and wonderful Fact of Christ come from? He did not produce Himself. Somewhere in the Universe there must be what is capable of producing the matchless appealing fact of Christ. The Cause, the Origin, the Source of Christ is hidden somewhere behind the visible Universe. And of that Source—which we call God—surely we can assume this—that Christ is like Him, as a son is like his father?

That seems to me to be solid ground, on which to base our faith. We can build a philosophy of life on that. We do not need to ask to see the horses and chariots of Heaven: it is enough that we see Jesus and know Him, for He is the Witness, He, the Son, that beyond the rim of the visible there is the Father, and His watch-

fulness, compassion and grace. If Christ persuades us of that, we have got a working faith, a faith that will make all the difference in our attitude to the facts of life. In the strength of that, we shall endure. With that for our philosophy of life, we can "carry on" in quietness and confidence of heart.

*“ For even the Son of Man
came not to be ministered unto,
but to minister.”*

(MARK x. 45.)

XVI

THE HOME MINISTRY

IN these words the spirit of the Master is summed up. For Him, greatness lay not in getting but in giving. His is that supreme glory of living which we can only call divine, and this is the mark of it, that He asked not to have others attend upon Him, but to serve and help them. It is against that standard that we must measure greatness. He would lay no veto upon ambition. He would have us all strive to be great. But His kind has ever since overtopped all other greatness ; it means giving, serving, loving.

Suppose we take this ideal of Jesus and set it up in the midst of our homes, and see how it illumines that dear province ? The Englishman's home, it is said, is his castle. Perhaps there is no other nation on earth so wedded to the love of home as we are. Home is more than our castle, it is our temple, our shrine. We take our worries there, and lose them. We take our hurts there and have them healed. There are gentle and gracious ministries there for all our moods and

sicknesses. And we are very, very grateful for all that, God knows. It is one of the things we give thanks for oftenest, the gift of home and those who make home for us.

But if our homes were to ask us what we chiefly sought there, what would our reply honestly have to be? Is it to be ministered unto or to minister? Which? We get in plenty, but what do we give? Now, Home, in Christ's eyes, is not a place where others are to serve us, but a place where we are to serve each other.

Who has not seen or known homes where the atmosphere is one of peace, and the spirit of comradeship reigns, where all the members, varied as their interests may be, are knit into a loving unity, and stand foursquare to the world? Explanation of such a state of affairs—and it is no uncommon one—rests ultimately on the discovery that the members think of and consider one another. That is quite a sufficient explanation. The spirit is one of unselfishness. There is no one will standing out strong and masterful, to which all the others must submit for the sake of peace. All alike have equal rights, and the right of each is—to serve.

And when homes that ought to be perfectly happy just miss that blessing, the reason, as a rule, is that some one is asking too much for

himself or herself. It is selfishness that makes the wheels in some homes creak and jar at times. One wants this and the other wants that, and neither will give in. Such a home is being run on the principle of self-assertion, and there's "nae luck aboot the hoose" under that management.

If, in our stubborn pride, it seems a weak thing to give in, and, instead of demanding that others come into line with us, seek to find their point of view, let us remember that that—if it be correctly named—was the weakness of Christ. If it ever seems unmanly, according to our standards, to stoop and serve those about us, don't let us forget that by that measurement Jesus was unmanly too. For even the Son of Man, said He—and what a glimpse into His thought about Himself that "even" affords!—even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.

*"Jesus said unto him, Verily
I say unto thee, To-day shalt
thou be with Me in paradise."*
(LUKE xxiii. 43.)

XVII

TO-DAY—IN PARADISE

(AN EASTER MEDITATION)

IT is not exactly an Easter text, yet the wonder of the Easter message is there, framed in the experience and reckoning of one human life. Like a timid wayfarer on some uncertain doorstep, the penitent thief knocked but once timidously at God's door, and, lo, it was flung open on the instant, and he was bidden to enter, with gracious words. We cannot think it wonderful that he should turn to God in his last moments, or that he should listen then to the long-stifled voice of conscience, but what was supremely wonderful was that he should next turn in thought to the patient, uncomplaining Figure by his side, and say, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And this was the answer he got ! The Easter hope shining even in the darkness round the Cross !

The disciples had three more anguished, heart-broken days before the truth broke on them. But Jesus knew now. He knew that Death was

not the end, that the Cross did not block the road. To His eye of faith there was light beyond it, green pastures and quiet waters, a palace-garden (for that is what paradise means), the Palace itself, the Father's House.

To-day. No word in the record strikes more solemnly and mysteriously on the ear than that one. It takes us to the edge of the Infinite and leaves us gazing over. To think what "to-day" meant for the thief in its total content, to imagine the experience covered by that word for him, sends us, as J. M. E. Ross says, "on an almost incredible track."

The day began for him in a condemned cell, and all the torture of anticipation. There is one "last dawn" for us all, but this man knew he had come to his, with no chance of escape—and he was alive, strong and well.

At midday they led him out to a cruel and horrible death. It does not bear thinking of, for it calls up too poignantly our Lord's physical sufferings, on which the Gospel draws a merciful veil. But there was, there must have been, the long, hot afternoon of thirst and deadly sickness and agony. And then, with the mists gathering before his eyes, this blessed word—To-day—in paradise.

And, sometime before that day ended, this

poor wastrel slipped out from the coil of life, escaped from the pain and the shame, the jeering crowd and watching soldiers. To-day for the thief on the cross ended, in the evening, in some land of peace and light, illimitable, unimaginable, far away or near at hand—who knows? We who read the story are like blind men tapping with our staff along a road which comes here on emptiness. Our staff touches nothing. Beyond is another Kingdom, another sort of life than we know. But as we follow this wayfarer in thought up to the edge, where we lose touch with him, we marvel as we say the words, “It is still to-day with him, somewhere.”

Imagination reels and falters here. There is no ground beneath the feet. But wherever that shining realm of peace and life-abundant may be, Jesus and this man entered it together. His warfare accomplished, Man’s redemption purchased, the Saviour returned to the Realm of God from whence He came. And His retinue, as Victor over Sin and Death, was a crucified malefactor. The lowly King of men who asked nothing but a stable to be born in, and a wooden cross to die on, went back to His Father’s House with His arm round a poor penitent thief.

There is nothing that more daunts men’s hearts than the loneliness of death. The old

and the young, the frail and the timid, the most cherished and the dearest must go that road alone. We cannot help them one foot of that journey. All our ministry and affection stops at that edge.

“Thou loved and cherished must go forth alone.
None sees thee fondly to the door; not one.
No head is turned to see thee go; we stay
Where thou art not, and pray.

“Alone, alone, upon thine awful way!
Do any show thee kindness? Any stay
Thy heart? Or does the silent Charioteer
Whisper, ‘Be of good cheer’?

“We know not, none may follow thee afar,
None hear the sound of thy departing car.
Only vast silence, like a strong black sea,
Rolls in ‘twixt us and thee.

But Jesus said “With Me.” He took the penitent thief with Him. And shall He not care for all His brethren who go that way after Him?

But where, and what, and after what manner? Ah, who can say. Jesus calls it Paradise, and the word, which is poetic rather than theological, gives us liberty to dream.

“There falls not hail or rain or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair, with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea.”

We have each our own dear fancy of what it may be, made up of all that is most precious in our chambers of memory—as our images of the unseen must inevitably be. We build our heaven with our own most precious stones, our aspirations, our hopes. And Jesus has given us liberty when He used the haunting lovely word “paradise.”

But from our own imaginings we come back to words like these, which seem to go to the utmost limit that human speech can reach in saying the unsayable and catching the last utter beauty of hope fulfilled—“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

“ Jesus, in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest,
Who art with God the Father
And Spirit ever blessed. AMEN.”

"Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses."

(HEB. xii. 1.)

XVIII

THE LIVING BACKGROUND OF LIFE

THE author of this Epistle is writing to Greek-speaking Jews who have become Christians, and his purpose is to comfort and encourage them in their new manner of life. He reminds them of those of their own nation and kindred who have lived the life of faith before them, and are now spectators of the race they run. He bids them imagine that they play their part before tiers of interested onlookers, a great cloud of witnesses, watching them with eager sympathy.

We think too seldom of this Christian background of life. It is the foreground with which we are chiefly occupied, our daily work, our immediate surroundings, and such help and inspiration as lies about our feet. It is within that narrow and isolated platform of experience that we think of ourselves as playing our part. But that is not how it seems to the author of this Epistle. It is to him as if the players on a stage were going through their parts in what appeared to be a dim and empty theatre, when

suddenly the lights were switched on, and they saw that the place was full from floor to ceiling. Life is not a closed chamber, after all. Behind and around us are the ages past, the great and good of bygone days, the men and women of our own kith and kin. When we yield basely to the unworthy purpose, it is before these. When we rise up and cleave to the right, it is in the presence of these witnesses.

When one is troubled in some way, there is a certain comfort in meeting some one else who has had the same experience. So, when our religion takes on the aspect of a race, when it begins to call for sacrifice, and spells cost and loyalty and effort—and if it be real, that aspect will not be wanting—it is good for us to remember that we do not begin the Christian life, that we are not living it for the first time.

Others have gone before us, and had their strivings and doubts and temptations, and yet have kept the faith, and finished their course with joy. Sore as your temptation may be, you have not "resisted unto blood, striving against sin," and some of the witnesses have done that. You yourself know of those who have followed Christ to the end through great weakness and constant pain, and you have been blessed with good health and are strong. Some have had to travel

through great valleys of deep darkness, and yet they endured, faring forward bravely towards where they believed the light to be ; and your faith, weak as it sometimes is, has never been so completely eclipsed as that.

The race these ran is just the one we are running now. And our Captain, and the perfecter of our faith, was theirs also. The goal set before us is the one they strove for, to keep the faith of Christ and be found in Him at the last. There is community of interest, therefore, between those who occupy the stage now, and those who have passed from it and gone to swell the number of the witnesses. With larger other eyes, and, surely with something of God's own joy even in the feeblest spark of good, they watch those whom they have left to carry on the race and bear the banner which once they bore. We might bear it more worthily did we at times remember the dead hands that have passed it on to us.

I have read that in the famous picture of the Madonna of San Sisto at Madrid, Mary and the Child are surrounded by what was for long thought to be merely clouds, but when the grime of ages was removed and the picture was closely examined, the clouds were seen to be formed of myriads of angel-faces ! And now, for every one

who has seen it, that picture has a living background. It is such a transformation that the author of Hebrews effects for his readers and for us—turns the clouds about our life into angel-faces, watching us as we live and work and pray.

For many of us, the most potent inspiration in the idea of the cloud of witnesses lies in the fact that some of the faces are of those whom we have loved long since and lost awhile. You remember that fine verse with which Stevenson concludes his tribute to his father's memory. The Stevensons for two generations had been lighthouse-builders. Their lights stand all round our shores to guide our coastwise ships, and point the way to safety.

“ This hast thou done, and I, can I be base ?
I must arise, O father, and to port
Some lost complaining seaman pilot home.”

God only knows how much of the patience and courage and usefulness that brighten and help this world is begotten of that wistful regard for what those would wish to see who have gone before and left a precious memory and example. How many a lad, lonely in a strange city, has been kept straight and innocent because he believed his dead Mother was watching him still. There are men and women in the land being saved from

selfishness and God-forgetting at this moment because they cannot but think that some one, once dear to them, is near them still unseen, and they would not do evil before these eyes.

But of all the faces in that cloud of witnesses with power to bless and encourage us, there are none like those whom we once called by earth's tenderest names, not famous at all, but good and true, and, in our eyes at least, beautiful. Dare we be base while we think of them ? Is it possible for these memories to plead with us in vain ? Nay, but as they followed Christ, and left us an example, so by God's help may we follow, believing—and who shall say that we are wrong ? —believing that they are watching and love us still.

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned."

(1 COR. ii. 14.)

XIX

THE NATURAL MAN

IF the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit, what, in God's name, is to become of him? Is there no Gospel, no hope for such men? Are we to think of God's world as a small coterie of spiritual folk, and, outside of that, the great mass of merely "natural" men and women? Is that Christ's world?

It has been declared, very truly, that Paul would have been distressed beyond measure to think that, in centuries to come, any words of his were laid alongside the Master's, as if they were of comparable authority. Rather would Paul have said: "No, I am only a sinful, erring man. If anything I have written seems to you to enhance and magnify the wonder of the Christ, to His name be the glory. But if anything I say seems to dim or narrow or obscure His teaching, then, for Heaven's sake, blot it out and forget it!"

Really, however, we are doing Paul an injustice.

He is not talking about what we call the average man at all. He is contrasting two types whom he calls, in his Hebrew psychology, the "psychic" or natural and the "pneumatic" or spiritual. The "Psyche" is the principle animating the body of flesh and making it live. Sometimes it is rendered "life," and at other times "soul." The "pneumatic," on the other hand, is the man possessed by the "Pneuma" or Spirit of God. Yet Paul allows that the Pneuma is also a normal element in human nature. So the division is not a rigid one.

But all this is not only not very clear, and not our division to-day, but it makes us the more thankful that Jesus did not talk in that manner.

I do not want my preacher to claim to be spiritual, and to label me and other folk, from his height of virtue, as "natural" or what not else. The man I want to hear is he who begins : "No, I have not attained, I am very far indeed from being spiritual, but I have caught a glimpse of what spiritual living can be, and I propose that we seek it and learn it together."

Yet, the longer I live, the surer I am that Paul is right, and that spiritual things are only spiritually discerned. It is not simply a question of brains or intellect or understanding, but something more, and that something from God. The

most that we can say is that there are days when we are "in the spirit," and these are the days when we see far, and know, and are persuaded. And the only explanation of these hours is that somewhere in us a door, a window was opened Godwards, and His ever-waiting Spirit came in. Spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned. Next day, next week, they may look entirely different.

But that is only to say that we are not always spiritual, any of us. The prophet who faced Baal's worshippers on the hill-top, so sure of himself and his God, was found afterwards under a juniper tree, requesting for himself that he might die. We are not always on the hill-top. Yet we have learned a great lesson when we have recognized that our spiritual moments are our best moments, and when we cleave to their verdict and affirm their supremacy in face of all subsequent temptations to doubt or question them.

The division, then, between natural and spiritual is crossable, for we, alas, often cross it, who by our calling ought to be spiritual. Let us declare it for a Gospel, therefore, to the natural man that for him also it is crossable, whenever he wants to. It is a pestilent heresy to tell him that he cannot cross or want to cross so long as

he is natural, and he must wait for the Spirit of God. It is not so we act in common life. All our powers, physical and mental, as well as spiritual, are from God. And we get them when we make the call upon them.

God helps and enables us, physically, at the same moment as we make our effort. I get strength to raise my arm, when I raise my arm. So, God's spiritual power comes to me when I really want to live for Christ and with Him, and I decide that I am going to do it, when I make my vow and take my stand. The great thing is that one wants to. There are no great barriers in the way of such a man, however little he knows, or however great his perplexities, who really wants to.

There is nothing in the story of Christ's life on earth more blessed to remember than His confident trust in the ability of simple ordinary folk to be the kind of disciples He wanted, and to find God, in Him, and live in His trust and love. He never hinted to even the lowliest, "This is not for you, because it is spiritually discerned." He said: "If any man will open his door, I will come in and sup with him." His picture of God was of One waiting and aching with longing until we want Him and ask His Spirit. Jesus said, in effect: You know how you do with your own

children. All that matters is your child's need, his desire for what you know to be for his good. You will give him that, if it is in your power at all. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give"—give, what? The very thing that makes the difference between the natural man and the spiritual!—"the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." No natural man, who covets that, is going to be refused when he asks Him. No natural man who longs to "discern the things of the Spirit of God" is natural any longer. He has already crossed the line.

"He made as though He would have gone further; but they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us."

(LUKE xxiv. 28-29.)

XX

THE EMMAUS ROAD

THE road to Emmaus is the best known of all the highways of the Spirit. Christ's lovers linger there with expectant hearts, for it is on such a road that the Lord walketh still. Emmaus is the road of the Risen Christ, and in the manner of approach of this Stranger, in whose company burdens are lightened and gloom departs, and whose words so stir the heart, we may learn how He draws near to men still.

As we read this story, with the advantage of knowing the end from the beginning, we can watch Christ taking His own road into lives that need Him, and we can see, too, how men, whose eyes are holden, and who seem to themselves to be only obeying some elementary human instinct of pity or brotherhood, are really setting their door hospitably open for the Christ Himself.

When the three drew near to Emmaus, and the Stranger, it appeared, had yet farther to go, they asked Him to come in and rest awhile. And the first and greater wonder is what happened when

they sat at their simple meal. When this Stranger took the bread in His hands, something in His thoughtful, reverent manner lit a sudden glow in their hearts. As they looked in amaze, the veil dropped from their eyes, and they knew Him for the Christ, their Lord and Master.

Who can imagine the blessed fellowship of that hour, the great bound of their joy, which you can still hear echoing through the later New Testament, the thanksgiving welling from the very bottom of their hearts? Jesus had been everything to them. In Him God had been made real and gracious, and to live in His fellowship had been Heaven. Then it had all gone, like a dream, for He had died and left them. And now it was all theirs again, more wonderful than ever they had dreamed. He was with them still! That is the first wonder.

But the second lies close beside it, that He, who was waiting and eager to bless them with this knowledge of Himself, should have "made as though He would have gone further." He did not assume that He would be a welcome guest. With a marvellous courtesy, He would not thrust His fellowship upon them, though He knew—what they did not—what it meant for them. He respected their liberty, He deferred to their right to choose their own company.

Do we realize that it is with this chivalrous, courteous, patient, waiting Christ that we have to do? He respects our pitiful privacy. He will not storm any human heart. He will not burst masterfully into our lives, though our need may make Him ache with longing. He waits to be asked. He stands humbly at the door till we invite Him. Oh, the wonderful humility of God, who has given to the least of His children the liberty to bid Him begone!

There are men and women to-day who are sick of themselves, and would give anything for a real living contact with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The only hope for themselves that they see is in Him. And yet, somehow, they have no assurance that He is really with them. Have they ever asked Him?—really, purposefully asked Him? For, as we read this story, unless the vague joy of these disciples in this Stranger's company had crystallized into an actual invitation, Jesus would have gone farther on that night.

But they chose, and chose rightly and wisely, as we can see watching them, though they chose in the dark. What guided them?

To them, remember, the Stranger was just a Stranger who had walked far and was tired. Home and a meal awaited them, but He apparently had farther to go. So they asked Him in. It was an

elementary human impulse of brotherhood and compassion that prompted the invitation. Note that. It was for His sake chiefly that they spoke. The way had been long, and they were grateful for His company, and the comfort and healing of His words, and, in simple hospitable fashion, they said, Come in, and rest awhile. And by *that* door, which simple human kindness held open, the Christ Himself came into their lives with His hands full of blessing. He came in at the door which they opened to a Stranger. That is surely written for our learning, for the Risen Eternal Christ comes that way still. Do you remember how often He told us so, when He lived on earth? Whosoever receiveth one such little child in My name receiveth Me. He comes in that company. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these, ye have done it unto Me. He enters by that door.

The fellowship of God in Christ Jesus is not hedged about by weariful pedantic little rules so that we may miss Him if we do not know them all. God, Who is in Christ, is also in and behind and around all our life, with its endless opportunities and constant challenges. And though, in His divine humility, He will not come unasked, there are many ways of asking Him. We are, as a matter of fact, asking Him or refusing

Him every day. For Life and God and His Christ are one. He has identified Himself with life as it meets us every day. He is behind and in it all, and the heart in the Stranger's breast, to whom, when we are wise, we offer welcome and shelter, the heart in that breast is His.

But there was something more than mere hospitality in their invitation. There was response to what seemed to them good and of God in this man's company. They loved the highest when they saw it. They held out their hands and their hearts to the goodness and the truth they saw, though it had not a name as yet. Their attitude to this human worth that came their way was one of willingness and humility and worship. And that is always to set the door open for diviner visitors than we know. The conscious fellowship of Christ is for those who covet it and seek it through the best in everything. To love and choose the best we see and know, in human character or human word, is setting the door open by which God's Christ comes in.

But, you say, this is impersonal, and choosing in the dark, and there is surely something more than this. Yes, thank God, there is. But it is clearly written here that it was because these men chose wisely and truly in the dark that they

came face to face in the end with the living personal Christ. And chose Him then, again, with open eyes.

Their experience cannot be ours. For there is no scarred Hand at the table with us in our homes, no reverent thoughtful breaking of the bread to witness that the Christ who gave His perfect life in love for men, condescends to dwell with you and me. Yet He is the same Christ, and we need Him no less than these disciples. And when we ask Him into our lives and hearts, to dwell there, to heal and forgive the evil, to make us truly His in spirit and service, He surely comes as of old, though we see Him not. Else is this Gospel a mockery of our hopes. He surely comes though we see Him not. He has promised: If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in. We cannot *see* Him, but we can have our door open every day and all day to every one and everything in the least like Him.

*"Then Herod questioned with
Him in many words; but He
answered him nothing."*

(LUKE xxiii. 9.)

XXI

THE SILENCE OF CHRIST

THERE is nothing we are surer of to-day, in the realm of religion, than the graciousness of Christ. There is a last mercy of His, we feel, that stretches very far, as far as the East is from the West. The Gospel we believe in to-day is a gracious one, a Gospel of love. And there is such, God be thanked.

But are there no limits, conditions, or barriers? There are. And there is a superficial kind of religion popular in our time which is ignoring them, shutting its eyes to the great sanctities and vital moral distinctions, and making of God merely a Person of an easy benevolence, a Father entirely complacent, and conceiving of Christ as an eternally smiling Friend who will condone anything. There is no awe or reverence in it, and it is in danger of losing that holy fear without which there can be no true fellowship between finite man and the Eternal.

Let us realize that there is such a thing as the silence of Christ, that there are moods of men,

and men themselves, to whom even He has nothing to say. He never ignores a question that is sincerely put. For the soul that seeks His mercy or would learn His truth, He had a response unfailing and gracious. But even His Love had its laws and prohibitions, its checks and silences ; and that is a truth it were well to learn.

When He was tried before Caiaphas the High Priest, He was faced by witnesses who were deliberately swearing away His life. They were lying, and knew it, and so did the judge. But when Caiaphas asked Him if He had anything to say, He answered nothing. It was the silence of Horror. Into the pure and sinless mind of Jesus there crashed the horror of the fact that in sheer hatred and spite the religious of His day were ready to lie to get Him out of the way. It is not adequate to say that Jesus stood before Caiaphas as Love incarnate. For the Love was writhing in pain, horrified, shocked, stricken dumb at the moral perversity and cruelty of men. There is a stop there. The moral majesty of Christ rises before us, and we stand on holy ground.

When these same religious leaders coarsely haled before Him the Woman taken in adultery, they encountered another awesome silence of

Christ, the silence of Shame. There was pity in His heart for the lost glory of her womanhood, but, even more, there was shame for those would-be holy men blatantly making a spectacle of her, crowding round, and gloating over the miserable story. To Jesus they seemed worse than her, and the spectacle shocked Him into silence.

When we think of the stuff with which some of our newspapers are filled ; and that there are circles where it is counted a sign of emancipation and up-to-dateness to hawk such stories about ; when we hear of crowds of men and women infesting the Courts of Justice where such stories must needs be told—then, if we are to bring any thought of Christ into contact with that side of our modern life, it cannot be, if the New Testament is any guarantee, a smiling, complacent, tolerant Christ, but rather a Christ so overwhelmed with shame that even He has nothing to say. He is everybody's Christ, we do not forget : yet there are men and women from whom even He has to turn His eyes. He cannot speak.

Pontius Pilate encountered another of those revealing silences of Christ. Pilate was the least guilty of all His judges, and recognized the nobility of his prisoner. But he was in a dilemma. There was a struggle going on in his soul. He saw the right thing to do, but he dared not do

it. So, when, turning aside to another issue, he asked, "Whence art Thou?" Jesus made no reply. To the man who sees his duty and will not take that road, even though meantime he may be seeking some higher knowledge, Jesus has nothing to say. There is a divine order of things with Him, and first things come first. Men must be willing to do the will, if they would learn of the doctrine. It is a serious thing to take our problem to Christ unless we are willing to follow the truth we already see. Otherwise we meet His silence, searching and stern, driving us back on ourselves until we learn our lesson, and humbly take His road and do the right that we know of.

The most significant silence of all was that before the profligate and superstitious Herod. He, hoping for a miracle that would reflect some glory on him, plied his prisoner with questions. But Jesus merely looked at him and spoke not a single word. In all solemnity we ask, What does this awful silence mean? Was Herod so seared and callous that Jesus would not say a word in his presence? That might be a reason for others, but never for the Christ. No past, however shameful, could keep back the words of hope and mercy on His lips, if there was the faintest stirring of sorrow or longing for deliverance. But there was nothing of that. Herod had

steeled his heart to its own reproof until it was impervious to any. And that is his judgment—silence, the silence of a Love that was aching to help him, if only he would have allowed himself to be helped.

But that is not a note to end on. We must return to the fact of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He never sent the most ignorant seeker away, and He was accessible to the timidest: He has words of hope and healing for any prodigal among us who comes to Him honestly, however ignorantly or in whatever poor rags. “Him that cometh unto me,” He says, “I will in no wise cast out.” To all who need Him and want Him He is gracious, beyond our desert or our dreams. What a holy fear, then, may well be upon us as we realize that there are men and moods of men to whom even He has nothing to say.

“The good-will of Him that dwelt in the bush.”
(DEUT. xxxiii. 16.)

XXII

GOD'S GOOD-WILL

THE setting of the words is primitive and Hebrew, and “Him that dwelt in the bush” is just an early fashion of saying “God.” But what arrests us is the good-will. Is there really such a thing, for you and me living where we live to-day, as the good-will of God? Is it among the things to be counted on, and lived by? It would be great, if we could believe it!

But what proof is there? you ask. None, of course. You can never prove a truth about God, except by venturing upon it. But there are good grounds for believing in God's good-will.

And the chief of these is the fact of Jesus. The one thing no one can doubt about Him is His unconquerable good-will, His “undiscouragable friendliness” even towards His enemies. He saw good where no one else could. And His sympathy and good-will for men and women of no account and no reputation was like a rock for them to stand on. Even on the Cross, His good-will towards those who were doing Him to death

shone out in the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

And He taught good-will. He calls His followers to live as sons of the Highest, who is kind to the unthankful and the evil. He would not let a man offer his gift at the altar, with ill-will in his heart. That was an alien element. He believed, to take into the presence of God.

Why? Because there is no ill-will in God. With every accent of Christ's emphasis on the duty of our showing good-will to others, He is committing God to it. If we have any reason to feel that we must be kind one to another, we have the same reason for believing that God's good-will is real too.

And if we only lived for one day in the trust of it, it would be the happiest day of our lives. We should have courage and patience, hope and helpfulness to spare, that day! And why should Christian people not believe in it? The New Testament, the Gospel, Jesus Himself stands or falls with it. Unless these are all myths and dreams, the good-will of God is something on which each of His children can count from the beginning of life to the end.

And it is the cure for fears, worries, and anxieties. Is the scheme of things benevolent or hostile? That is the fear that lies at the bottom

of so much of the fret and tension of our lives. Jesus says that the Ruler of the Universe is our Father.

There are slogans of to-day that we are advised to repeat when we are dressing, or before we fall asleep. But this is better than any of them, for it includes them all, and is the basis of them all, and if it is not true, none of them is true—this one, that God's good-will is with us all day and every day. God is never against anybody, but always for him, for the best in him, his highest welfare, his truest happiness. There is a great healing restoring urge in Nature, which is called the "*vis medicatrix naturae*." It is just another name for God's good-will, and the sick man who trusts to it is wise. For the nervous and the worried, trapped by circumstances, and haunted by spectres, it is deliverance to believe that behind the tangle of things visible is the Father's good-will.

When we are in the grip of some strong temptation, when our roads divide, and one climbs and the other dips down alluringly, we want to feel that somewhere in the Universe there is sympathy and help and good-will for us in our feeble little fight, or the small climb that looks so steep and hard to us. And whenever we really see Jesus Christ, and His grace and wonder lay hold of us,

we need no other assurance that somewhere in the Universe there is an infinite reservoir of good-will, for it needs that to explain Him.

Sooner or later, however, we are brought against the fact of our deserving. Why should God have good-will to you and me? In the face of what, in our best moments, we know ourselves to be, does the whole thing, then, break down and the good-will recede and vanish? No, for there is a Gospel, good news about that very matter—that the measure of God's good-will is not our worthiness but His love. His love is upon even the unthankful and the evil. God has no other way, no other method. Though we forget Him, He does not forget us. Like the Father in the story, He waits at the road-end, day after day, and He suffers by our wandering and our self-will. Yet all the time His love is between us and any real harm, it picks us up and heals and saves us every day. And the symbol and sign of that eternal waiting, suffering Love, the sign of it in human history and in the sight of man, is the Cross of Christ. That is the measure of God's caring, a fullest outpouring of love in which our ill-desert is lost.

But that is not all. We have begun by arguing from the good-will required of us to its existence in God. But don't let us forget that it holds the

other way too. And just by so much as we realize something more of God's good-will to us and rest upon it and rejoice in it, by so much the more are we bound to express it to others, to share it and pass it on. We, too, must be merciful since our Father in Heaven is merciful.

"And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, to bear the cross."

(MARK XV. 21.)

XXIII

SIMON OF CYRENE

THINK of the honour conferred on Simon of Cyrene ! He succoured the Son of Man in His hour of weakness, and bore on his own shoulders for a space the Cross of Jesus Christ. If our best friend is he who helps us when our need is greatest, surely Simon was Christ's best friend !

When we speak of the friends of Jesus, it is their indebtedness we think of rather than His —what John and Peter and Thomas received from Christ, rather than what they gave to Him. It was Christ who gave, but He did not ask, or when He did, as in the garden, He asked in vain. He trod the wine-press alone. He saved others, Himself He would not save. But there is a strange delight in ministering to the bravely independent and the self-forgetful, fallen weak for once. And that was the honour of Simon when he put forth his hand to help Him Who asked of men nothing but to let Him help them.

Think how silently and blindly Simon was led into this place of honour. He was not a native

of these parts. Though he was a Jew, he belonged to Cyrene, and had made the long pilgrimage up to the Holy City to be present at the Passover. When the procession of the doomed met him on his way into the City, he had probably to ask the meaning of the strange excitement. And when he was told that the weary-looking man was Jesus of Nazareth, with whose doings all Jerusalem was ringing, it is probable that that was the first time he had heard the name. He could have refused, when, in their masterful Roman way, the soldiers ordered him to take up the cross under which the prisoner was sinking. That was reckoned odious service, not asked save of the lowest. Why did he not refuse? What did he see in Christ that impelled him to do this thing?

The answer lies deep among the secrets of personality. Jesus was Jesus, and that is as near to it as we can get. Would you or I have done the same in Simon's place? I wonder! There was no halo round Christ's brows, remember, nothing that patently marked Him as the Son of God. He was only a tired, pathetic figure, going to suffer the last penalty of the law. The appeal to Simon was the elementary human appeal of sorrow, of a fellow-mortal in distress. But that is the road along which Christ comes to

us all. There is no special way cut for the Christian appeal. God uses the elementary human channels when He comes, and fills them the fuller. You cannot bar out the human, and admit the purely Christian or the spiritual, for they come by the same road. You are on the way to succour Jesus Christ when you help a needy brother by the roadside.

Simon bent his back and took the shameful load upon it, not knowing what he did. Not knowing that from his lodging in the suburbs of Jerusalem he had stepped, that day, into the heart of the greatest scene in the history of the world. Afterwards he knew, and gave God thanks. But his moment came to him on silent foot, and was gone again before he knew it for the greatest moment in all his life.

It is so that our great moments and our spiritual opportunities come to us. Therefore let us not quench our pity or be grudging of our aid. Let us pray to be always kind, and ready to help. Even though nine times out of ten, it may seem to be pity or kindness thrown away, the tenth time, it may be, we shall be found to have entertained an angel unawares. The tenth time it may be Christ Himself.

Devotion loves to linger on this incident, and weave webs of fantasy around it. But it is

solid fact that, before long, this man was occupying a prominent position in the young Church, and his sons Rufus and Alexander were following in his steps. It was under the Cross that Simon first met his Lord and Master.

Is it permissible to imagine that Jesus may have spoken to Simon? We remember how graciously He rewarded Mary for her gift of ointment. Would He be likely to let such a service as Simon's pass unacknowledged? The Lord had but a few more minutes of liberty left, before the bitterness of death and anguish unimaginable closed in on Him. Would it not have been like Him to give those last minutes to Simon, as they walked together, protected from intrusion by a frowning line of Roman steel? Theirs, as John Watson has said, was the privilege of the dying,—to be left alone. What Jesus said, if anything, to Simon in that last sacred fellowship, we do not know, and it is too sacred for us even to conjecture, perhaps.

But this we know, that when Simon came into the city that morning the name of Jesus meant little or nothing to him. And when he left it again for his distant home, it was with a memory graven deep in his heart of three crosses set on an hill, against a darkened sky—three crosses, on the midmost of which Jesus had died. Some-

how or other, before he left the city or afterwards he learned, what the other disciples discovered with a great outburst of joy, that their Lord and Master was with them still, that Death had not held Him, and He was theirs through all the years to come. Even though his ideas of what had been accomplished at Jerusalem must have been vague and undefined, one wonders when and how the little point of light was lit in his sorrowful heart,—that though he had carried the cross for Jesus, yet, if what these men said was true, there was another and more mysterious and more sacred sense in which Jesus had carried it for him, and not for him only but for the whole world.

“But Peter followed Him afar off unto the High Priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with his servants, to see the end.”

(MATT. xxvi. 58.)

XXIV

TO SEE THE END

“To see the end.” We know both the words and the tone. The picture they call up is of some family, summoned from different parts of the country, to the bedside of some old mother or father, “to see the end.”

But was that the thought in Peter’s mind? It would not be surprising if it were. We have the New Testament, and twenty centuries of Christianity to teach us, but he stood at the beginning of these marvellous happenings, and could not know. He just knew that his beloved Master was in the grip of Imperial power, and he foresaw what the issue would be. Broken-hearted he followed, afraid, with nerve and hope and courage gone, hating what he saw, yet fascinated and held by a spell, to see the end, as he thought. And every probability was in favour of his reading of the facts. Precedent and common-sense were on his side. Everything,—except the fact that Jesus was what He was.

But Peter was mistaken. This was not the end of Jesus Christ, as the Church, keeping its Lenten watch, and living again in memory through those days, is getting ready to declare anew. The end was several chapters on, and it was a wondrous one. The end is the Word of a Risen Christ saying: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And even that is only the end of the beginning, for Luke's Gospel, as he himself declares in Acts, is only a record of what Jesus *began* to do and teach, and the most wonderful part was still to come.

A distinguished theologian once declared what was the divinest fact in history for him, and it was not the Gospel story, nor the teaching, nor even the Cross, but what happened after,—the impact of that "Something" upon the world. When you watch that impact you see hopeless and despairing men turned into radiant tireless lyrical ambassadors of Christ, the hope of immortality resting on a new basis, and the history of the world being changed. You see a new thing forming before your eyes, a Church of God, a Kingdom on earth, and growing, like a flower, like a tree whose leaves are for the healing of nations, as a tiny thread of silver

grows to a stream, and finally to a river, on whose broad bosom float the ships of the world. End of Christ! No, it was not the end, however much it looked like it to Peter's broken heart.

And *because* it was not the end, many things follow. Much light is cast on human experience and sorrow. It was a tragic failure, on the face of it—and it is just because it looked so desperately final that it gives greatness and strength to our hope—it looked final, yet out of it grew the Kingdom on earth and twenty centuries of Christianity. Failure is a word to be used cautiously in God's world. Because there is a living God, who is in Christ Jesus, men must be slow to say they see the end of anything that is worth while.

This is true even in ordinary affairs, but it is specially true of spiritual values, of the riches not to be measured by any material standard. End is a word not lightly to be spoken there.

What is the end, for example, of a gracious influence or a good deed? Like ripples in a pool it goes on till it reaches the utmost edge. It is seed cast into the ground, and there is no end to that. This is what all those who are trying to do some good in the world would do well to

remember. For, black hours come, when they are tempted to draw a line and cast up account, to reckon on the one side all the labour and prayers and hopes, and on the other, the result, which, in such hours, often appears to be *nil*. Ah, but they must not draw the line. The time for that is not yet. It is for God to say when the line is to be drawn. There is no sincere failure in Christian service that is not illumined and redeemed by the blessed failure of the Cross of Christ.

Nor must we speak lightly, as some do, of the end of the Church. Often in past years and centuries its end has seemed near. And it may yet be that in the centuries ahead the Church, as at present organized, shall disappear, and die. But, if so, like its Lord it shall rise again into newness of life.

Still less must we speak of the end of that of which the Church is but the outward expression, Faith. Time and again men have declared that we have come to the end of the age of Faith. It always stands on tiptoe, as Chesterton says, as if about to leave this world, and yet it never goes. It is the "perpetually defeated thing that yet survives its conquerors." All modern historical research, into the past as into the present, just makes it the more certain that man is incurably

religious, that he cannot and will not live by bread alone. God made us for Himself, and there will only be an end of religion when there is an end of God.

Best of all, just because what Peter saw was not the end, so, when we gather at some dear graveside, and cast in our flowers with tears in our eyes, the hope is in our hearts that *that* is not the end. What they are, or where they are, we know not, but because Christ lives they shall live, and we shall live also. That is what Christ has done, taken away the bleakest, dreariest Finis on earth. In our fear and despair we wrote across the gate of Death "Ne Plus Ultra," No More Beyond! But with His pierced hand, the Risen Christ covers the first word, so that it reads now, "Plus Ultra," There's more to come!

The end of Christ! Science says that Man has been on the earth millions of years. Christianity has not yet been two thousand years. And Man may be on the earth millions of years more. Shall men, then, in the ages ahead, need another Christ? As well ask if they shall need another God! We know not indeed what other light or fuller revelation will come to the men away on through the mist of the centuries. But it will not be a reversal or denial of Christ. It will just

be more of Christ. For while men's thoughts expand and grow towards Him, He is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. He abideth for God is in Him. And God Himself is the only End. As He is the Beginning.

*"It is expedient for you that
I go away."*

(JOHN xvi. 17.)

XXV

WHY JESUS WENT AWAY

THE disciples must have heard the saying with sinking hearts. Like clods on a coffin-lid, they told the end of the most wonderful fellowship in the world. For Jesus had been everything to them.

When they thought how He had been treated, they could hardly wonder that He should deem it expedient for Him to go. But what perplexed them was that He clearly regarded it as best in *their* interest. It is expedient *for you*, He said. In later days, when they looked back, they understood better, and, as we ponder the words now, with centuries of Christian experience to enlighten us, we can see something more of meaning in them. Let us try to think our way in to this saying of our Lord.

There is something of the accent of every true teacher here. The best teacher is not he who crams facts into you, and goes on feeding you, but he who arouses the love of learning in you and fits you to discover and learn for yourself.

The day comes when he wants you to stand on your own feet. And so he says it is expedient that you should not lean on my visible help any longer.

There is something here, too, of our Lord's concern for the life that is lived by faith. He set before His friends an example of a life lived in perfect dependence on a spiritual environment, drawing its strength and sustenance from the Unseen. They watched Him, awed and thrilled, and content to be by His side. But Jesus wanted something more. He wanted them to enter that Kingdom for themselves and be at home there. So long as He was there, a visible witness of the reality of the heavenly kingdom, their faith could not have its full exercise. And Jesus laid supreme emphasis on the life by faith as the highest kind of manhood. To Thomas, convinced by visible evidence, He spoke of the greater blessedness of those who "have not seen and yet have believed."

Maybe, too, there was some thought in the Master's mind of the illumination that death brings. His disciples would see Him more clearly and understand Him better when He was gone. Though it hurts even to think so, a deep truth lies in that paradox. We do not know our dearest truly, until we have lost them. Sorrow

brings its own illumination and purges the vision to a clearer understanding.

The reason, however, that Jesus Himself gave was that the Comforter might come, that He might be with them in spirit. It is a natural wish that visits us at times, that we could see Jesus as He lived in Galilee long ago. But, clearly, He is thinking of a better blessing than that. It is expedient for you that I go away.

When Jesus was on earth, it was a man's life He lived, a limited life. Martha said to Him, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." But He was not there. He was somewhere else. One thinks of that as happening often, and necessarily. Men and women and children must have wanted Him and needed Him, when He was somewhere else. Bartimæus, the blind beggar, shouted by the roadside, and Jesus, passing by, heard him. But there were other roads, with beggars on them, where He never passed at all.

There is a passage in one of Henry Drummond's books that helps one to realize this better. He supposes that Jesus is still in Palestine. And he goes on to imagine how all the ships sailing that way would be crammed with pilgrims. Suppose, he says, that you wanted to go and speak with Jesus. When you got near the Holy City where

He was, you would find a crowd, miles deep, there before you, all those from north, south, east and west, who wanted, like you, to see Jesus, and have speech with Him. Some had been waiting there for days and weeks and months, and had only got a few yards nearer. It would be practically impossible for you to come near Jesus, if He were still in the Holy Land.

And that lightens His words with a new meaning—It is expedient for you that I go away. It means that He can be with us in spirit, for there are no barriers of space or distance in the spirit-realm, He can be with us all, with each of us always.

Last generation, the only way to hear a singer was to go to the hall where he was appearing. To-day there are wireless waves pulsing through every house in the land, and any one who cares can come into touch with the unseen influence, just where he is. The solace of the music is for him alone, as if there were no other. Yet the miner in Wales and the shepherd in Scotland and the sailor at sea is hearing it also. In some such poor way as that we may realize how in spirit Christ is near to every one of us.

He is no longer in Galilee, but the spirit in your heart is His. In the mysterious centre of

your being, you are in contact with the Infinite. There's a door there somewhere into the spirit-realm. And at that door the Lord knocks. Nobody needs Him or wants Him anywhere but He is there. "Raise the stone, and thou shalt find Me. Cleave the wood and I am there." He is nearer to each of us than breathing. At home and in business, He is where we are. We can never get away from Him or shake Him off. His spirit is in us. It is because He has gone away that He can say: "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The visible Jesus has gone, that the Christ unseen might be with each one of us. It is expedient for us that Jesus went away. But, oh what a cruel, hard road it was by which He went!

"Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

(JOHN ix. 25.)

XXVI

A SIMPLE CREED

IT was a wise reply that the erstwhile blind man made to the Pharisees who were badgering him so. He told what he knew about Christ from his own experience of Him, but he refused to go beyond that. His creed was a simple and rudimentary one, but it was notable for two things—what he put into it, his actual experience of what Jesus Christ had done for him, and what he kept out, speculation about Christ.

The purpose of a creed in a Christian Church is to bind men publicly and explicitly to Christ, and to the Church as His. That is an article that must be in it. It is not Christian without that. But if it be asked what else should be in it, there is much to be said for the answer—Nothing else at all. In order to be members of Christ's Church we must be bound to Christ, but we ought not to be bound to anything else, not to any man's interpretation of what is implied in the Fact of Christ, nor even to the Church's philosophy of what Christ is and has done.

It is not that these interpretations and philosophies—which constitute a Church's body of doctrine—are not of importance. They are of immense importance. No sensible man who is left quite free will esteem lightly conclusions which have been arrived at, or confirmed, after twenty centuries of thinking about them. But it is one thing to be satisfied if a man takes up the Christian attitude towards Christ, and to leave him to gather his own theology as God giveth him understanding, from his experience, and with these findings of the past to help him ; and it is quite another thing to ask him to accept these, *to begin with*, as the condition and definition of his relation to Christ.

The late Prof. Denney, who was one of the ablest New Testament scholars that this country has produced in our generation, and a theologian eminently sound and cautious, makes an earnest plea in his "Jesus and the Gospel" for the simplifying of our creed, and himself suggests a form, to which a special interest attaches as coming from one so careful. Here it is—"I believe in God, through Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord and Saviour." That is all. But the man who can say that is a Christian, and nobody but a Christian can say it. What an immense boon it would be to Christendom if

that form were substituted for the more elaborate ones in use in many Churches !

For one thing, it would promote unity among all Evangelical Churches ; and in face of all our problems to-day we must deal with the forces that perpetuate divisions among ourselves. If that were our common creed, we should really feel that we all belonged together. That does not mean that any of us want either to cheapen or disown the opinions for which our fathers testified, and sometimes suffered. But these are opinions, and ought not to be elevated into articles of faith which a man swears most solemnly in the presence of God. If we wait to realize our essential unity till all our opinions coincide, we shall wait for ever. But why not set upon our banners the elementary Christian declaration that unites us all ?

By that means we should receive into the membership and active service of the Church men and women who are at present for no sufficient reason outside. There are not a few who are kept outside a particular communion because, in addition to the essential articles of its faith, that Church has inherited certain theological traditions to which its members are assumed to be bound. But these earnest scrupulous souls feel that they are not bound to these traditions, and ought not

to be bound to them, with the same bond which secures their allegiance to Christ. If, however, we made the fact of allegiance to Christ and to God through Him the one essential condition—as in very truth it alone is—that barrier in the way of some whom the Church to-day needs sorely, as they need it, would be done away.

Among all the candidates for Church membership that one has dealt with, surprisingly few have ever stated a difficulty that was essentially religious. Nearly always it is a theological one. It is not what Jesus Christ asks from these young people that is the difficulty. It is what men seem to ask, what the Church appears to ask over and above the one demand of Christ.

When His call is ringing in a man's heart, it is surely as certain as anything can be that the Master does not mean him to refuse his allegiance till he has squared his theology with the prevailing standards? It is his allegiance, and that alone, that makes him a Christian, whatever his difficulties may be. If he finds in his heart the desire to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Saviour, no other disability that can be named ought to bar his entrance into a Church that is simply Christian. He will learn much more by and by.

But to ask anything more than that confession, as a condition of entering Christ's Church, is to demand more than Christ required when He called men to be His disciples and friends when He was on earth.

“The Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys.”

(I KINGS XX. 28.

XXVII

GOD OF THE VALLEYS

THE Syrians were mistaken, as they discovered. Yet the mistake is often made still. It is one of the commonest misconceptions of the religious life.

There are not, it is true, a great many people who deny that there is a God of the hills. There are times and places in the lives and experience of most people when they are compelled to believe in God. It is only the fool who says in his heart, There is no God.

But there is an extraordinarily persistent idea that the valleys are out of His sphere, that the ordinary levels of life are remote from His rule or interest. When we speak of His providence, we mean, nine times out of ten, something big, unusual, striking, not what is lowly and familiar.

When full grown and obvious, this is called by the ugly name of formalism. The formalist is a man who pays his homage to the God of the hills because it is the correct thing to do, but, that done, he comes down the hill for the rest of

the week, and the restraints or leadings of the Christian religion trouble him no more. Religion, as he figures it, has nothing whatever to do with his life from Monday morning till Saturday night. The extreme instances of this type figure, now and then, at the High Court or the Old Bailey, and Jesus has described them for all time when He speaks of those who "devour widows' houses and for a pretence make long prayers."

But we need to recognize that this is a most insidious spirit. None of us can with truth assert that he is free of it. There are not any of us who on the ordinary levels of daily life do not come far short of the religion we profess on Sunday. And it is only the frank admission of that fact, and the humble confession of our failure to God, that saves us from the perils of formalism.

Those who in ordinary life or in religion despise or neglect the ordinary are, likewise, repeating the Syrians' mistake. There are some people who, in the words of the hymn, are always "seeking for some great thing to do or secret thing to know." The religious life, with them, is a series of ecstasies and thrills. Their God is only to be found on the hills, but the valley, with its routine and roughness, its calls for patience

and faith, the ordinary humdrum valley,—they know not the Lord who meets His friends and servants there.

Ah, thank God for an Incarnation that brings Godhead down into the valley. Thank God if we have learned, through Christ, to believe in the concern of the Eternal with "the simple duties that meet us every morning, and the common joys that consecrate our homes, and the common burdens which we all must bear." Don't let us miss the half of what religion can mean for us by despising the ordinary and the commonplace. There are men and women who start out in search of religion with the idea that it is something far-fetched, complex, exclusive and nearly inaccessible. While the fact is that it is so very simple that they miss it where it lies, in the valley close to their feet. "The truth is nigh thee, even in thine heart."

When Jesus would show us what the love of God is, and how we should receive it, He found symbols and expressions of it in the ordinary everyday life of men, in a father's love, in a friend's sacrifice, in the trust and confidence of any average little child. Theology, on the other hand, as some one has said, has too often ranged through halls of justice and palaces of kings and other remote and unfamiliar places in its

search for measures and standards of Divine truth, while all the time what men were seeking for has been smiling on them in their nurseries and by their own firesides.

When Our Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman, He taught her that the question about the worship of God the Father was not so much the place,—“this mountain or Jerusalem”—as the spirit. Where? asked the Samaritan. Everywhere, said Jesus, anywhere, in spirit and in truth.

The full Gospel, as Jesus has brought it, is that hill and valley alike are God's, that religion has to do with every corner and every hour of life, and that even as men worship when they pray, so do they also when they work or wait or learn, in spirit and in truth. If only, when we call Him Lord, we had a clearer vision of what that means! It must mean Lord of our daily business so that we are bound to show Him honour and worship there, by doing justly and loving mercy and walking humbly with Him. It must mean Lord of our everyday speech, for the unkind, unclean, or untrue word, even when spoken in secret, is treason and disappointment to Him. It must mean Lord of our very thoughts, since He desireth truth even in the inward parts.

“On His head,” we read in the Apocalypse,

“were many crowns.” Long since perhaps, we crowned Him Lord of the hills, King of all life’s holy places, Master of all life’s sacred hours, keeper and Saviour of our souls. But that is still only Samaritan Christianity. We have not made the fullest use of our liberty till we have added another crown, and made Him Lord of our common days, Master in all our labours, Partner in all our pleasures, God of our valleys also.

ACTS x. 9-18. (*Peter's vision on the house top.*)

XXVIII

FOR EVERY MAN

WHAT Peter learned from his vision was that the Gospel was not only for Jews, but also for the Gentiles. And it is curious that he should ever have resisted that conclusion, for it seems clearly present from the beginning of Christ's ministry. Our Lord did not see men in classes or strata or nations, but as one great family, children of the Father in Heaven. The message of Jesus was universal from the beginning.

From this certain consequences flow which we have not perhaps fully enough realized. When Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," He must have held that it was possible, that its essential, life-giving message *could* be preached to every creature. If it is to enter into every door, even the lowliest, it must be, in its essence, simple, so that the dullest and most ignorant of God's children can take it in. A missionary gospel cannot be a complicated one, and Christ's was a missionary gospel.

Does it not follow, then, that whatever in our conception of the Christian Gospel we cannot take to the least of His children, is not of its essence? There are theological and philosophical questions much debated among us to-day, but we cannot imagine ourselves taking them to the African native just dimly aware of God, as Christ's message concerning Him. That is to say, these are not essential.

And the sad thing is that the issues that divide us to-day are almost all of that character. Fierce disputes over non-essentials have always been the failing of the Christian Church. Most of the difficulties that young people bring to their ministers are not of the essence of the good news that was to be taken to every creature. There are thousands outside of the Church to-day because they feel they cannot accept certain doctrines. And one wants to say to these: "The truth as it is in Jesus is, as we all find, a very hard thing to express in daily life, and the best of us make a poor job of it; but it is a very simple, human, gladsome thing to grasp. When you begin to knit your brows, and read up, and consult text books, you can almost be certain that you have gone beyond the essential gospel and are in among the non-essentials." But if the Gospel is, and is meant to be, for

every creature, that is just what one is entitled to say.

There is something else implied in universality, however, besides an essential simplicity, there is the possibility of its acceptance by every different type and class and kind of men. There is a Gospel, and there is a Christ for the coal-heaver and for the priest, the same Gospel, the same Christ. In the realm of religion, pure and simple, we are all on a level. In matters of science or philosophy or theology there are all sorts of differences between us, but these are non-essentials, the product of special aptitude or special training. A religious experience no more entitles a man to pronounce, say, on the authorship of the Psalms, if he has no technical training, than it does to pronounce on the curability of cancer, if he is not a trained and qualified medical man. Religion is for everybody, as Christ is. Philosophy, theology, or what not else is only for those who care for it, and have had the training.

The quiet, contemplative type of person, fond of reading, and of sitting still, fond of "meditation," is not the only section of God's children for whom He has sent the message of His Love in Christ.

The robust, sport-loving, restless, outward-

looking soul, who hates reading, and is bored by "meetings," and counts self-examination a morbid process, is also among the "every creature" to whom Jesus expected that His Gospel would be good news, if it were truly and wisely presented.

The *literary* emphasis of our English Christianity and Church life leads to an illegitimate narrowing of the Gospel's appeal, for not every one is keen on that side of things. Jacob may be, but Esau is not, and he also is a "creature," for whom the Gospel is intended. And there is no more reason, after all, why the gift of God to the world in Jesus should be associated so exclusively with books and meetings and a certain quiet demeanour, than there is for its being dissociated from, say, interest in athletics or politics or travel.

What chance has a coster who cannot read, and for reasons that seem good to him cannot be tempted into a church, of having God's good news brought within his reach, as things are to-day? And yet Christ meant it for him, and the thousands more like him. He Himself won even the publicans and outcasts of His day, but not in that way—rather by giving Himself to them and being their friend. To befriend a man for Christ's sake is to preach Christ's Gospel to him.

And there is room and need for a very great

deal more of that kind of preaching, even if we have to curtail some of this kind in order to get it done. That is one reason why institutional work is such a true ally of evangelistic effort. Not everybody is to be won for the Kingdom by listening to an address. But of these, some at least can be won, and have been won, through fellowship in the off-duty hours, through comradeship in sport, or rather through the personal influence in these things of a manly wholesome Christian character.

There are some who are colour-blind, and cannot see red or green as we see these. But is there any one colour-blind to God, with no power to receive His Gospel, no matter by what channel it seeks them? I do not believe it. If Christ and His Gospel are really for everybody, then, in every conceivable human way, and not merely by preaching, the Church should be getting alongside those who have not had their fair chance yet, and not only telling His truth, but living it, acting it, playing it, incarnating it somehow. What a tremendous field for that there is, even in our own city! And beyond the city there is the whole field of the world. Every creature. *Every creature.* What a task for all who believe in Christ! And can we be said to have done very much more than just *begin*?

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you.”

(PHIL. ii. 12-13.)

XXIX

THE ESCALATOR THEORY

ONE of the beliefs of the Victorian age on which we now look back with an amazed wonder was its doctrine of progress, as something that was practically automatic and inevitable. The bewildering extension of knowledge in that generation, together with the new way of thinking of life in terms of development, led to a belief in human progress that was independent of man's choice or exertion; the mechanism, in some manner, worked itself, and the world was practically bound to get better all the time. Mankind was on an escalator, so to speak, and must in the end arrive.

It was a singularly comfortable and complacent doctrine. But unfortunately it is not true, as we have discovered. For the War came, with its sudden jolt and crash and lapse into barbarism; and with many, many more precious things, the escalator theory of human progress “went west.” We learned then, through blood and tears, that nations, like men, could take the

wrong turning and drive headlong down the hill. And, so far from the gains of civilization being fool-proof, they had sometimes to be fought for, and died for. There is such a thing also as devolution, degeneration and descent. No, we don't believe in automatic progress any more. We don't believe that it is possible to drift up stream. Unless we row, and keep on rowing, we must drift down. So the words of Paul about working out our own salvation are congenial, and we accept them, willingly.

But do we realize that they are as true of individuals as of nations, that there is no such thing for you and me as automatic progress? Nobody supposes that when Paul wrote these words, he meant in any way to belittle the Grace of God. Salvation is only by Him. It is simply axiomatic that we do not "save" ourselves.

Yet a surprising number of people do seem to believe that after the first gift and call in Christ Jesus, it is simply a matter of standing on an elevator. Surely we cannot imagine that salvation is a thing given to us like a title-deed, and not rather, as its very name implies, a blessing like health, needing, like it, to be cared for, and used, if it is to continue and increase. There is a river of God which is full of water, but what if we are not drawing and drinking? There are

winds of God to waft us on our course, but the sail we must hoist ourselves. The fact of Christ is the pledge of a better world, but it is you and I who must work out the betterment. Are we as clear about these truths as we are that the Victorian theory of automatic progress is a delusion?

There are parents to-day who are virtually professing the Escalator doctrine in another form when they leave it to their children to decide for themselves for Religion or against it, and even take a queer kind of pride in not seeking to prejudice them either way till they have come to years of discretion. As Coleridge pointed out long ago, that is on the same level of wisdom as leaving it to our gardens to decide whether they will grow weeds or roses. We all know what the result will be. God does not "rain roses," as George Eliot tells us, "if we want more roses, we must plant more trees." Weeds grow early enough, and where weeds grow, roses may grow. But not unless we plant them. That "work" must be ours.

And yet—for the best comes last in this Word of God as with God Himself—when we have laid the fullest emphasis on the need for working out our own salvation, we are brought in the end to recognize, with bowed head and worshipping

spirit, that even there we are not independent of God, for all the time He is working in us.

The last and most blessed truth of all is that, even when we try, we cannot get outside of God. I want to raise my arm, so I must will it and do it myself. That is my own work, if anything is. And yet I cannot do it without God, for the strength and power are His, and if He worketh not in me, I cannot do it at all. You desire to live in closer fellowship with God. You covet more of the mind of Christ. So you go to Him in prayer and ask His blessing on your means of grace. You work or read or "practise His presence" in some way. And all the while it is God in you that has begotten the desire. It is the touch of His Presence that has revived you. It is He who inspired the prayer who answers it. He who bids you seek who is found of you.

It is folly to try to divide between God's share and ours in the life of the spirit, as in all other forms of life, for the truth is that it is all His. "We fight, but 'tis He who nerves our arm." Every littlest effort after Christ-likeness, every resolve to pursue the best things more earnestly, aye, even the homely vow to "turn over a new leaf" is a sign that His Presence is with us, and His Spirit striving in us still. It is all God. In Him we live and move and have our being.

"In Him enfolded, gathered, comprehended,
As holds the sea her waves, He holds us all."

We must work. And we can all work harder and more earnestly at the things that count. For life is a serious business, and ours is a high vocation. But, thank God for the truth that He is in it, too, not forsaking us even when we forget Him,—thank God that "He worketh in us."

“His train filled the Temple.”
(ISAIAH vi. 1.)

XXX

THE OUTER COURT

ONE of the things that impressed Isaiah, when he had his vision of the Lord in the Temple, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, was that his “train filled the Temple.” Had the skirts of this divine and kingly Being been seen only in the Holy of Holies, that would not have been surprising ; or even in the inner Court, where no Gentile dare come. But there was in the Temple also an outer Court, which was practically secular, as open as a street. And the train extended even to that. It filled the whole Temple, leaping over every division, making the whole one glory.

Do you see what the prophet is trying to say ? That he had it borne in upon him in his vision that God is not confined to any one room or court of human life, but that He fills it all, that He is really in places where we never think of looking for Him. Up to the very utmost limits of human life, and in its every lawful activity, Isaiah would say, I saw the carpet of the robes of God.

If all those who believe in and claim to be followers of Jesus Christ only realized that what Isaiah saw was the Truth, that the God and Father whom Jesus reveals is in all our life, that His train does indeed fill the whole temple, not its holy places only, but its outer courts as well, all the work that we call secular, all the busy noisy days, and all the labours of the week—what a difference it would make ! It is probably because so few of us do realize that, that our daily lives have so little about them that is Christlike, and that there is often such a gap between Sunday's worship and Monday's pleasure or ambition. We have crowned Christ King of our holy place, but so many of us keep Him there. It is another King who rules over the rest of our life.

Business or profession can never be carried on as it ought to be by professing Christian men till we do deliberately and solemnly and really make Christ King there. Home will never be what it might be till He is followed and served and honoured there.

We shall never have the Peace we want and need until, among Christian nations, the doors are unbarred and opened that are keeping out of our counsels the Spirit of Christ, which is love and brotherhood and doing to others as we

would that they should do to us. The "catastrophe of the Peace," that we all now know so well, occurs on a small scale often enough in our own lives. We shame our Christian profession by the things we say and do thoughtlessly or deliberately. We do not live like those who have had a vision that all our life is under the rule of Christ, business, home, recreation, all of it. We have not seen that His train fills the whole temple of life. There are departments and corners with which we do not connect Him at all, where we do not realize that His spirit can come.

But we all know some one who has had Isaiah's experience, who brings the spirit of Christ somehow into everything he says and does, whose daily life and religion, whose Monday and whose Sunday seem to be all of a piece, woven without seam or division.

And we know that these are the men who are really commanding Christ to the world. Everybody is the better who is in their company. Every one honours and admires and is helped by them. Like Christ Himself, they draw all men. That is real Christian discipleship. That is surely what Christ means all His disciples to be. And what, by His Grace, we all might be, if we gave that ideal of daily living the place in

our thoughts and efforts and prayers which it deserves. We have committed our souls to Him, but He wants all the rest of us as well, our minds, our hands, our lips. He desires, for our greater good and truest happiness, to be King in every sphere and corner of our lives. Shall we not give Him what He seeks, the lordship, not of our holy of holies only, but of our outer Court as well ?

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

(ROMANS viii. 15.)

XXXI

FEAR OR SONSHIP

ACCORDING to St Paul, there are the two ways of living in the world, either in the spirit of bondage, with its inevitable accompaniment of fear, or in the spirit of Christian sonship, expressing itself in the prayer, Our Father in Heaven, with all that is implied in that faith.

Yet even in this Christian century, if we were honestly to write down a list of the things we feared, how long and various it would be. We may laugh at our neighbour's fears, but we take our own "worries" very seriously. It sounds better to say, "I am very much worried," than to say, "I am in a state of bondage through fear," but that is what it amounts to.

There is, of course, a legitimate apprehension which is just the other side of due care and forethought. There is a fear which is instinctive, which is physiological and healthy, like the fear of pain or of death, a form of the instinct of self-preservation. We are meant to shrink from the thought of death. When we lose that wholesome,

natural fear of it, so that we walk out to seek it and meet it, we have ceased to be normal persons. Something has gone wrong with the delicate mechanism of the mind.

But the things on our list would be other than these, if we were quite frank about it, fear of ourselves, fear of society, of what people will think or say, fear of the "skeleton in the cupboard" getting out, fear of financial calamity, of loneliness, of old age, of ill-health, and so on. And Paul has the right word for all that—bondage, a state of slavery, chains upon one's happiness or one's power to be or do one's best.

Temperament has something to do with the matter, as Paul very well knew. Yet he is also a witness that a man may be temperamentally fearful, and yet choose and act and endure most heroically. And early teaching has also to do with it. Wherefore, let all of us who have the care of children, either at home or school or church, realize again how cruel and shameful it is to exploit or develop a child's natural fear, and how particularly cruel and shameful to connect fear, in the mind of a child, with any sense of God's presence or any thought of Jesus Christ.

In many directions, the bondage of fear shows itself in modern life, in practical inefficiency—"I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the

earth"—in "the ignoble economy of truth, and timid acquiescence in error, and fondness for compromise" of Church and State.

Superstition is fear, and superstition is rife in our time. "The subway news-stands are littered with a bastard crew of magazines bally-hooing short cuts to brain power, will power, thought power and personality plus." All superstition is of the nature of a short-cut. When you wear a mascot—deliberately and seriously, of course, I mean—to bring you success, you are trying to grasp at effects, while ignoring causes, and that is a short-cut, with which nature and life will have nothing to do. It is also a sign of fear. The mascot speaks of an uneasy mind. The God that superstition worships is a capricious God, one who can be hoodwinked and cajoled. You can make yourself clean and holy, merely by saying often enough that you are clean and holy already!

And all of that, and all the bondage of fear, personal and social, is resting on an erroneous idea of God, as Paul points out in this great chapter. It is the message of Jesus that God is our Father, and that our relation to Him is that of sons and daughters. It is in father-love and mother-love that we may find the truest conception of the attitude and character of God.

Now, you don't need to appease or conciliate

love. You cannot win its regard by penance or sacrifice, for it is yours already. A son has a mother's love bestowed upon him. So has God's love, Jesus would have us believe, been upon us from the beginning, so that all our sins are sins against love. No analogies from the arbitrary will of earthly sovereigns, or from the processes of law courts—figures of which Theology is far too fond—can touch the essence of our relation to God, if that be one of children to a father. Phrases like the "satisfaction of divine justice," and "appeasing the wrath of God," suggest a court of law, and the spirit of bondage. They do not belong to fatherhood and the spirit of home, and Christ's gospel is gloriously "good news" for this among other reasons that it authorizes us to believe nothing to be true about God which is not good enough to be true of an earthly father or mother.

It was to Jesus Himself a continually surprising thing that His friends, who seemed to have grasped His thought about God, should still be a prey to any sort of crippling or hurtful fear. To believe in God, as Jesus would have us do, is, in His view, to be done with all unnatural and hurtful fears, is to trust Him as Father, and so enter the glorious liberty of sons.

For sonship means trust. The son does not know or pretend to know all his father's mind, and his

plans and purposes may be obscure or dark to him. But he trusts him, and he does not fear that what he does not at present understand can ever mean, or be intended to mean, real hurt or harm to him.

And sonship means obligation. Sons have a son's part to fulfil. God needs the services of His sons where He has placed them. With hands full of the duties given them to do, with thought for the need of others, rather than for passing moods or states of their own, seeing in the love of Christ what God really is, and casting all their care on Him, they can say, more and more thankfully, God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. That is how sonship speaks. That is how every son, enlightened by Christ, is meant to speak.

But we don't believe it. We don't assume it and act on it, we do not claim it thankfully and bravely—not because we have earned or merited it, but because Jesus has brought it to us—and so our fears remain. And will remain till we claim and use what is already ours, and in that spirit of sonship adventure into each new day, sons of God, trusting the Father, as Jesus has revealed Him, and "persuaded that neither death nor life . . . nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

*“ Lord, when saw we Thee an
hungred, and fed Thee? ”*
(MATT. xxv. 37.)

XXXII

THE CHURCH OUTSIDE THE CHURCHES

THERE is a Church outside the Churches. Beyond the boat that holds Jesus and His declared disciples, there are the “other little ships” that share in the blessings of His peace. It is as if there were a grace of God that could not be kept within the limits of any covenant, but must break through it to others outside.

In India, to-day, we are told, outside the influence of missionary effort altogether, those of an alien faith are actually inclining towards the ideal of Christ, and laying the emphasis on tenets and precepts in their own religion which approach most closely to His teaching. How are we to explain that, or the corresponding phenomena to be found in many directions in our own land, if only we look for it?

Why is it that little boats tied to the banks of creeks and inlets far away in the heart of the country begin, at certain times, to strain and swing at their moorings, as if moved by some invisible hand? It is the pulse of the tide,

reaching even as far away as that. And what else can we say of all the goodness and the real inclination towards God, outside of all Christian agencies whatsoever, but that it is the tide of God's grace lifting and moving even those that are afar off? In all humility, and in all Christian charity, let us all recognize that there is such a thing, that not all of Christ's true disciples and lovers are openly in the ranks of His friends.

And further, let us recognize that we are entitled to all the comfort and encouragement to be extracted from that truth. It is something we do well to remember, when we make up our statistics, that there are many who really are in communion with us in spirit who do not figure there. When we are depressed by the smallness of our companies here and there, it is not amiss to remember that we can neither see nor count all those who are looking to the same Lord.

We are never without need of the reminder that the visible Church is not all the Church there is. When we think of the missionary enterprise of the Church, it is a legitimate encouragement to lift up our eyes in imagination to the wide fringe and margin beyond it all. For the seed of the Kingdom is not only being toilfully and faithfully planted. It is also being blown about,

where the Spirit listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.

The peril of this doctrine, true and inspiring as it is, is that it so easily ministers to slackness, and makes us acquiesce in small companies which might easily be larger, and understaffed mission areas where the fields are white and waiting. We must not let this truth tempt us to sit at ease in Zion. For unless there be the Church, with its central warmth and life and witness, there will soon be no fringe outside of it. There would have been no seven thousand in Elijah's day, if there had not been faithful prophets afore-time, and a loyal remnant linking on with the past.

The unconscious Christians in our own City are only made possible because there are such people in the City as definite and open and whole-hearted followers of Jesus Christ. You can trace the influence of the leaven in far away and unexpected corners only because a focus of strongly working stuff is being inserted in the centre of the mass. If we were to leave the magnificent Foreign Mission enterprise of the Church to carry on as from now, with the impetus it has already got, and did not continue to pour into it our thoughts and prayers, our gifts and personal service—then all that wonderful pervasive in-

fluence which so heartens us to hear about, would speedily die out and disappear. The scent of Eastern flowers and spices meets you miles out at sea, only when the plants are alive and growing.

It is only as an incentive to more hopeful and strenuous endeavour, therefore, that we have any business with this doctrine of the Church outside the Churches. It is something to thank God for, and take fresh courage. That doctrine is doing its proper work on us only if it persuades us to keep pegging away, not only doing our bit but doing our best, in the faith that to that best of ours, poor and small as it may be, God in His own marvellous fashion addeth His own incalculable increase. But we must cast in the seed, and keep on doing it. There can be no increase, no fringe of God's own devising in a field that is not being faithfully tilled. Just because we believe, in all charity and thankfulness to God, that there *is* a Church outside all the Churches, let us all pledge ourselves anew to a more loyal and constant service of our own.

*“No man having drunk old
wine straightway desireth new:
for he saith, The old is better.”*
(LUKE v. 39.)

XXXIII

THE OLD AND THE NEW

THERE was a small coterie of John the Baptist's disciples who kept together after his death, adhering to their own customs, and fiercely loyal to their master's memory. Before that reluctant band Jesus, to whom John himself had pointed them, stands inviting their welcome for the Good News which He brought ; but they preferred the old fire and brimstone message of the Baptist.

And the marvellous thing is that Jesus excuses them. He had been speaking of the new wine and the old bottles, and with the thought of those dour loyalists in His mind, or even, perhaps, seeing them on the edge of the crowd, He goes on, He goes out of His way, to add, for their benefit and about them, “No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new : for he saith, The old is better.” Though John's doctrine was early grey morning to His full noonday, He declares it too much to expect his disciples right away to leave John's and accept His truth. What exquisite courtesy and gentleness !

How often, down the centuries, must Jesus have been met and saddened by this same spirit even in those who profess His Name—contentment with things as they are, reluctance to move forward, distrust and even fear of anything and everything new.

Usually it is Youth that proposes, and Age that refuses or obstructs. It is so hard for some of us to believe that the younger generation can possibly have clearer or worthier views of God's truth than we have. And yet—can God mean that that fresh outpouring of divine energy and wealth of ideas that we call the "new generation" is given by Him to us simply to be snubbed and suppressed until it has ceased to be new? What is the Mind of Christ on the eternal problem, the young wanting to go forward, and the old wanting to hang back?

The answer lies in our text. He has, first, a word gracious and tolerant beyond our deserving, in defence of those who seem anchored to the old ways. He says: It is natural. You can't expect those who have learned to love the old to accept the new at once. But under the exquisite charity there is another note. For Jesus came with the New, and stands by it. When His Gospel first fell on the world's ears, it was strange and almost unbelievable. Yet if the plea

that the old is better is to stand, it would have ruled out that!

In all the Churches to-day new views of truth and old views are facing each other; the new, restless, raw, perhaps a little crude and heady, like new wine; the old, staid, complacent, satisfied. And Christ has a word for both, if they would listen. He understands the preference for the old meantime, though He does not expect that time to be extended indefinitely (He said "not straightway," not "never"!)—and that is something for the new lights to consider. But He is also jealous lest the new should be lost by being forced into the old channels—and that is something for the old lights to remember.

In one of Ian Maclaren's books, it is told how a young minister who was a modern, and a dear white-haired saint in his congregation, who was not modern, fell out on some point of doctrine and had a sore estrangement. But the grace of Christ in both their hearts brought them together again in a beautiful and joyous reconciliation. The two reunited friends knelt in prayer together on the hillside, the old Highland shepherd and mystic, and the young man raw from the schools. And the finest touch in the story is that, as Ian Maclaren imagined it, it was the young man who asked that they might be "kept loyal to the

faith once delivered to the fathers ; " and the old one who prayed that they might be " fearless to follow as they were led into all truth." There will always be lovers of old ways of thought, as well as pioneers and prophets of what is new. But when they live and work, and, above all, when they pray together in that fashion, in the spirit of Christ's perfect patience and courtesy, it is He who is glorified, and His Kingdom comes.

It is not for nothing however that the Christian life is so often compared to a journey. For our Lord will not have us sit still. The new experience beckons, the new summons comes, if we will but venture, and forget the things behind. There is always a richer grace we have yet to discover further along the road. Christ is never content with things as they are, or with us as we are. Always He has the new waiting for us. There is always more truth for us to learn when the present little bit has grown familiar. And He knows that the new thing He holds for us will often seem at first repellent, requiring an effort to conquer dislike and go forward in trust. He knows that. He graciously allows for it, as He did with John's timid disciples. But He does not expect that recoil or refusal to last more than a meantime. He counts on us making the

effort. Loyalty to the old is good, but as we have read this story, what was keeping these men from the Kingdom was their distrust of what was new. And the new that day was Christ.

“There standeth one among you whom ye know not.”

(JOHN i. 26.)

XXXIV

THE CHRIST WE DO NOT KNOW

AMONG the crowd to whom the Baptist was speaking, there stood, unknown, unobserved, Jesus of Nazareth. It is so that He steps into the first public chapter of the greatest story in the world.

“There standeth one among you whom ye know not.” But we can say more than that. We *know* the Christ, and we know places where we expect to find Him standing, where we hope to meet Him, and do meet Him.

In the services of the Church for example, wherever two or three are gathered together in His name. In the pages of Scripture, too, Jesus is to be found, and there He speaks to us, and lays His touch upon our lives. It is His presence that sanctifies Home, and we have many a time met Him in spirit there. These are all lighted tracts of life, places made holy by His Spirit, and it does not surprise us that men and women should meet Him there. He does not stand there unknown.

But the words are haunting, and they go questing up and down our complex, heedless life to-day seeking their fulfilment. There standeth One among you whom ye know not. Is Jesus standing to-day in places where we do not think of meeting Him? The words make us look again at the common crowds and common business and common causes of the day, with a new wonder and expectation.

Look again at the day's work, with this candle to light it. It was not only or mainly in temple and synagogue that Jesus touched men's lives to new issues. He met a man once at the receipt of custom, in his office, in other words. A woman came to draw water at a well, as part of her domestic routine, and Christ was waiting for her there. Once He joined Himself to two men as they trudged sadly along the public road. And when His loyalest friends thought they had lost Him for ever, He came to them again as they were fishing. That is just life, common, ungilded, unromantic life, and Jesus stood in the midst of it, not in some sacred niche of existence, by Himself apart. Is it not true that He stands there still, interested in all its honest work and in those who labour and are heavy laden, though only poets and prophets ever get a glimpse of Him?

“ Where the many toil together, there am I among my own ;

Where the tired workman sleepeth, there am I with Him alone.”

Or look in another direction, in the light of this candle-word. Jesus, we know, was really concerned whether the wounded man lying on the road to Jericho was befriended or not, and as the Samaritan bent over him in kindly helpfulness, Jesus blessed him in His heart. But what was that wounded man to Him more than other wounded men ? Not any more, but just as much.

And as He stood on that road, so surely He stands to-day on those stunning traffic-laden ways of ours, whenever anything like what that the Samaritan did is being done. The Ambulance passes along. Some one hurt. Is Christ not there, blessing the Red Cross or the St John’s man in His heart as He blessed the Samaritan ? And when the hurt one is borne swiftly to some splendid Inn of God that we call a Hospital to-day, where hands both skilled and gentle take care of him, is Christ not there ? “ He that watcheth by the sick or wounded,” it has been finely said, “ watcheth not alone, for there are three in the darkness, and the third is the Lord.” We believe that Christ is with those who are caring for the

souls of men, but we forget that He is also with those who are caring for their bodies—which is all the Samaritan did.

We have not recognized the Christ as He stands in the midst of all the splendid healing, social, humanitarian work of to-day. We have not told those who are engaged there that Christ standeth among them. We have left them to infer that the only presence of the compassionate redeeming Christ is with us, as we worship and pray. And that is not true.

Look in a third direction and think of our Politics. During the War years we often saw that picture which showed rows of wooden crosses near a battlefield, and the figure of the pitiful Christ standing in the midst of them. We believed that that was true then. But very many of the brothers and comrades of those who gave their all then, are walking our streets to-day with empty pockets and sad hearts, because they can find no work to do. Does Christ pity the dead more than the living? If I could paint a companion picture to that other, it would represent a queue of unemployed in a City street on a winter day, and the pitiful Christ standing among them, as He surely does. And if politics can alleviate or mend that line of misery, He surely looks on there with approval, as on every honest

and earnest attempt to make men, women and children happier, healthier, and better in every way.

From the War's misery to the League of Nations is a natural step in thought. Surely, we say, as we read or hear of what it aims to do, and has already begun to do, God's finger is in that. Here, before our very eyes, is the Kingdom coming, slowly it is true, but surely, and that in the last quarter where we would have looked for it, the stormy arena of international politics. The signs of its coming are visible, and, please God, will become more and more so. Is it mere piety or mere poetry to believe that, where the signs of the Kingdom are, Christ, the King, is to be found also?

May God increase our faith and our vision till we come to be quite sure that there is no corner of life unredeemed by Christ's presence, no road in the world where He is not to be found, no part of the day's work where He may not be served and glorified.

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

(Ps. xlvi. 10.)

XXXV

THE CULT OF QUIETNESS

LIVING a full and varied life is one thing, and being always in a hurry is a very different thing. The one may be external to the real self, but the other is a habit of the mind. And it is the hurry-habit rather than the busy-habit which works the mischief.

It is because the spirit of haste has invaded our minds that we don't see half the beauty that is visible around us, in our gardens, our friendships, or our homes. We are rushing past life, in a desire to live. We don't give ourselves time to understand. Because our minds are hot and hurried, we snap out in a temper, we judge hastily and “mistake a sick face for a sulky one, and don't see when the other fellow has something on his soul.”

But, worse than all, it is because we are in too great and constant a hurry that we are not sure of God. We have beliefs about Him, but we do not know Him, for we cannot realize God when our minds are running like a mill-race. That

needs quiet, to know that He is, and that we are in Him. And till we know God and are sure of Him, we have no stable fixed point in life, no wall, amid the jostle of things, against which to put our backs. Our great need to-day, as the spiritual experts are always telling us, is that we take time to be quiet occasionally, and realize the presence and the fact of God, and all that Jesus has shown us of His love, good-will and patience, take time to think Him into our life and daily business.

We all believe that there is a God, but how scant the opportunity we give Him to let us realize it ! Religion, with most of us, is too much talking to Him and about Him. We besiege Heaven with our petitions. But how often are we just quiet. Waiting for Him to touch us with a sense of Himself !

“ For God is never so far off as even to be near,
He is within ; our spirit is the home He holds most dear.”

So, for many of us, God is a theory that explains life, rather than a Presence that glorifies it. We hope rather than know. And even one experience of being quiet and having God announce Himself in the poor temple of our inner self makes life a different affair altogether, and this

a different world. The Psalmist's words point the way for us all. Be still. Cultivate the quiet spell. Be by yourself sometimes and cast everything out of your mind but the thought of God and yourself. It is in such hours that men and women are remade, filled full again with joy and hope and courage.

It is a thousand pities that the one blessed opportunity for the quiet hour with God, namely, the old-fashioned Sunday, is being gradually filched from us. That day, too, is being more and more invaded by the spirit of rush and bustle like the rest. Just because that is so, there is the greater need for each of us, in his and her own private way which is nobody's business, to seek the Sabbath quiet sometime, to remember God, and open the door for Him to come in.

Remember how often Jesus summoned His friends away from the noise and business of life, even such a life as theirs, to the quiet place. Remember how often He Himself sought the solitude, and spent whole nights waiting upon God the Father. If He needed quietness sometimes, that He might keep His soul steady and placid in its depths, whatever cares or troubles might buffet the surface, how much more do we! It is the God and Father of Jesus with

whom we have to do, the Infinite Spirit from whom He came, and whom He showed to us through His human life.

“God, in Thy life, our little lives are ended :
Into Thy depths our trembling spirits fall.
In Thee, enfolded, gathered, comprehended,
As holds the sea her waves, Thou hold’st us all.”

To be still and know that, to take that sense of God out into daily life with us, where He is seeking to express Himself in all human activity, social, industrial and political, as well as moral and spiritual—Himself the upward urge behind it all—to give Him a channel through our lives, to let Him use us, to seek to serve Him as and where He needs such gifts as He has given to us—that would be for many of us as the dawning of a new day.

“Our best is but Thyself in us,
Our highest thought, Thy Will.
To hear Thy voice, we need but love
To listen, and be still.
We would not bend Thy will to ours,
But blend our wills with Thine,
Nor beat with cries on Heaven’s doors,
But live Thy life divine.

“Thou seekest us, in love and truth,
More than our minds seek Thee ;
Through open gates, Thy power flows in
Like flood-tides from the sea.”

Be still, says the Eternal Spirit who is seeking us all, be still and know. The word of Jesus through whom we see Him, know Him and trust Him is, Come ye apart and rest awhile. Let us covet more the grace of stillness, that God may speak to us. When we are alone with Him, and give our minds to His indwelling, "through open gates, His power flows in like flood-tides from the sea."

*“ Were there not ten cleansed ?
but where are the nine ? ”*

(LUKE xvii. 17.)

XXXVI

WHERE ARE THE NINE ?

THERE were ten lepers that sought the aid and healing of Jesus, and they were all cleansed. But, of the ten, only one returned to give thanks to the healer, and that one a despised Samaritan. And the question which Jesus asked, and every one with imagination is tempted to ask, was, “ Where are the nine ? ”

Why did they not come ? It was not, I think, that they were ungrateful or hard of heart. On the contrary, I can well believe that they shouted and gave thanks to God all the way to the priest’s dwelling. But they did not give thanks to Jesus. They glorified God, but forgot the visible human Agent. They honoured the invisible divine, but forgot that it was a Man who had healed them, with a man’s capacity to feel the sting of ingratitude. These men had not fully discharged their debt though they gave thanks to God every day of their lives afterwards. For it was not “ pure Godhead ” that healed them, but God in Christ Jesus the man. And till they had paid

their thanks to Jesus, in the only way in which one can thank a man, by telling Him to his face, they were unjust and ungrateful to Him.

We often hear of the really good people, the Christ-like lives outside of organized Christianity, that is, the Church in any of its branches. It is true that there are such people. We admit it frankly, men of a pure and upright life, who exhibit the Christ-like virtues in a pre-eminent degree, and yet have nothing to do with any Church. How are we to account for that?

We cannot admit that a man can develop as noble a type of character independent of the Christian ideal and the Spirit of Christ as he can by His aid. That would be to throw up the whole case for the worth of the Christian religion. We must recognize that these men, also, are debtors, even though it be unconsciously, to the same Spirit of Christ that inspires all that is good and true in organized Christianity. These men, too, have been healed and helped by Christ. But they pay no homage to, or recognize in any sort of way, that which represents the visible aspect of Christ in the world, the Church which is His Body. Yet it is to the Church they are debtors, because it is through it that the Spirit they have welcomed and live by has come to them.

There are thousands to-day who appear to

have made up their minds that they can get along quite well without the Church. Yet it is only narrow-mindedness and ignorance that would lump all these together as “without God or hope in the world.” Some of them unfortunately are. But not all, or anything like all of them. On the contrary, many of them are sensible of the goodness of God and grateful to Him for the blessings they enjoy. They make their prayers, though they never darken a Church door, and render due thanks to God as the Giver of all good. But what about their debt to organized Christianity, to the visible Church of Christ? It is to *that*, as a matter of history, more than to any other agency in the world that they owe their privileges and blessings such as education, liberty, the spirit of brotherhood, the honour of woman, the care of children, and all the gracious refining influences abroad in the world to-day.

Lecky, in a well-known passage in the “European Morals,” declares that the three short years of Christ’s active life have done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists. But it is the Church which has preserved and enshrined that tradition and Spirit of Jesus, and handed it down the ages. Is it only Church-goers who are the better for these

“softening and regenerating influences”? Where are the nine? They have been healed and helped by what the Church has guarded and kept in the world; as truly as those who have returned to worship. Perhaps they say “Thank God,” but why do they not recognize the Church which was His instrument?

If God puts it into my friend’s heart to do me a signal kindness, my friend would not feel that I had dealt fairly with the situation if I only gave thanks to God. He would expect, and have a right to expect, some gratitude, some recognition of him.

Though Jesus was hurt by the ingratitude of the lepers, He took no steps to lay His claim before them. He did not send after them, as one does with children who have failed in courtesy, asking, “Isn’t there something you have forgotten”? They got their blessing and went off thankless. And Christ suffered the slight, save for that momentary expression of His disappointment, in silence. He turned to the Samaritan, who had come back, and gave Himself yet more fully and graciously to him.

Men tell us to-day that the Church must go after the people if they won’t come to the Church, and remind them of their obligation. And, certainly, an institution that stands aloof in the

face of need and ignorance and simply waits, does not truly represent Him who came to seek and save men. But send after those who have gone away thankless, and chaffer for their recognition like a huckster at a fair? No! As Christ suffered ingratitude in silence, so must His Church do.

Meantime, there are those who do come, the Samaritans, so to speak, who have that in their hearts which needs expression to Jesus Christ. To these He gives Himself in a closer intimacy and friendship. To these He is, not Good Physician only, but Saviour and Lord. Returning to give thanks, they are enriched with fuller spiritual blessing. The nine were healed of their leprosy—a great boon, but not the greatest. It was the Samaritan alone who heard the words that dealt with the deep needs of his soul—“Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole.”

"For ye have need of patience."

(HEB. x. 36.)

XXXVII

THE NEED OF PATIENCE

PATIENCE is not a very popular or much regarded virtue in these days. We live at a great pace, and our toil is often severed from tranquillity. In so far as this indicates keenness, of course, it is to the good. There is no virtue in dawdling.

But the New Testament confronts us in a disconcerting way with the fact that patience is an essential Christian grace. And patience in the New Testament is a strong virile word, not mere passive resignation, the folded hands and the upturned eye. It suggests endurance, "endurance with faith as its basis," unflinchingness. Let us think of the matter for a little, that we may provoke one another, if it may be, to patience and good works.

Consider, first of all, that God does not seem to be in a hurry. "The mills of God grind slowly." Even in our puny brains we can grasp some sense of His mighty age-long purpose in this world, and the slow unhasting march of it is solemnizing. When Hugh Miller was writing

about Old Red Sandstone, and the idea of geological time was dawning on the religious minds of that generation, it was said: "If it takes God so many æons to make Old Red Sandstone, need we wonder that the perfecting of human character should be such a long affair?" God has His order, which is not to be hurried, first the blade and then the ear. There is no jumping at once from blade to full corn. There are no short cuts in God's purpose.

When you read the Gospels with any care, you realize, further, that Jesus was not in a hurry. There was nothing feverish or excited about His attitude. "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" He said. For nearly thirty years He lived His blameless life at Nazareth, and when His public ministry began, its quiet unhasting character nearly broke the Baptist's faith in Him. And as Jesus was, so He taught. He had no opinion of the leader who embarked on a campaign first, and did his planning afterwards. The hasty facile judgments of His disciples He could not tolerate. If an enemy should have sown tares, and the servants, naturally enough, were all for rooting them up at once, Christ's counsel would be to let them alone. When the Devil offered Him His Kingdom now, on conditions, He turned from the temptation,

and took the long hard way of the Cross instead. No, Jesus was not in a hurry.

If you ask the reason for this untroubled, steadfast setting of His face towards His goal, the answer is clear. It was His perfect trust in God. He knew the Father, and "my meat," He said, "is to do the will of Him that sent Me." Jesus rested His human spirit utterly on the wise and loving will of the Father. With Him He left the issue; His were the utter obedience and the perfect trust.

In contrast with Him, how desperately in a hurry the best of us often are in ways that weaken our service and defraud us of our true happiness! What is it that lies at the root of all the intolerance and bigotry and dissension with which religious people are so often charged, but impatience? The Inquisitors of Spain were not all merely bloody-minded men; they were men in a hurry, unable to wait till Truth prevailed by its own sheer rightness. They must have all acknowledge it now, so they took their short-cut by doing away with those who did not see with them. But all our religious uncharitableness springs from the same root. We do not really believe that nothing can finally stand against God's Truth. So we shore it up in our fussy impatient way. That is not the attitude

of the serenely confident. "He that believeth shall not make haste."

If you are foolish enough to dispute the mathematician's axiom, he does not have you turned out of his Club, or call you hard names. He knows that the Truth will prevail one day, even with you. That is how the saints feel about the fact of God. And supremely that is how Jesus felt about the Gospel of the Love of God which He brought to men. He was so sure of it that He was never heated or impatient.

In all our work in His Name we need to remember "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." He was so sure that the future lay with good rather than evil, with love and brotherhood rather than hatred and strife. He was so superbly unafraid for the wheat, even when the tares were growing alongside of it. And from Him we may catch, and we need to catch the faith that any work done in His Name, any service of His Kingdom is abundantly worth while. It is like seed sown, and whether we ever see it again or not, God will take care of it. Have faith in Him. He has His own times and His own order. And if He can afford to wait, we surely can !

*"From that time many of His
disciples went back, and walked
no more with Him."*

(JOHN vi. 66.)

XXXVIII

A FAILURE OF JESUS

If mere popularity is to be regarded as a sign of success, then we are looking here at the failure of Jesus. At one stage, it is apparent that great multitudes followed Him, but when they came close and heard how He spoke of God and Man, the claims He laid upon them, the life He set before them, they just melted away. It was not that the crowd wanted.

It is also clear that He could have kept them if He had cared. He could have swept that crowd off its feet with enthusiasm if He had laid Himself out to do it. And if anything real and permanent for the Kingdom of God would have been secured by that, by giving the crowd in the first place what it came for, He would have done it, for the Kingdom was His chief concern in life. But He did not. It was not that He despised the crowd. On the contrary, the sight of one was a thing that always greatly moved Him, because He cared so much. And yet He let them go. He would not pay the crowd's price.

Furthermore, this strange failure did not react in any disastrous way on Jesus Himself. The crowd's desertion did not make Him doubt Himself, His mission, or God the Father. When you and I fail, we ask ourselves questions and test our methods. Jesus did nothing like that. His serene confidence in God, and the Good News He brought to men, remained. He was the Rock round which the crowd surged like the myriad waves of the sea. But the tide turned, the waves gradually retreated, and where they had once flowed deep, there remained but a tiny pool reflecting the heavens. Only the Rock stood solid and unshakable as before.

Jesus was content, apparently, to fail in that way, meantime. He made no attempt to recapture the fickle crowd's interest. God, Almighty though He is, will force no man's hand. Jesus Christ compels nobody. He does not win men by crowds, or by any crowd-impulse. He has only one method, Love offering itself to men. It is what He is that draws men and women to Him. Those who need Him come to Him, one by one. A man's answer to the soft entreaty of His character, and His passionate caring and sacrifice, is the only success that He esteems. His joy is "over one sinner that repenteth."

When we have realized that there is a kind of

way that Jesus fails and is content to fail, we begin to see other priceless things in life ranging themselves beside Him in that respect. Literature is not a failure, though more men read the evening newspapers than the poetry of Shakespeare. Science is not a failure, though the cinema-show can draw a larger audience. Nor does Science let down its aims or desert its precise exact methods in order to capture the multitude. It is content to fail with the crowd while rewarding every earnest seeker after truth.

Jesus let the crowd go. Not in contempt, mark you. When you and I speak of the crowd, we sometimes let an accent of disdain get into our voice; and just by so much are we poor disciples of Christ. For He loved the crowd even when they left Him. He would have done and have given anything to show them the way to life at its best. He died in utter love and loyalty to that crowd. It was the crowd that in its ignorance was made the instrument of His death. But He would not cheapen His message, nor win allegiance by a concession. In Him the Father's love was patiently seeking all men. He stood, a divine Voice among men, crying, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden." And those who want Him come. Jesus never fails with those who need Him. It is a

slow, slow process compared with the quick method of "catching the crowd," but Christ's way is God's way, redemption by love and waiting.

And from Him, His Church has still much to learn. One of the troubles from which the Church is suffering to-day is a quite excessive veneration for the opinion of the man in the street. Why should what is "built on a Rock" tremble and quake when the tide ebbs away? It is not the tide that makes the Rock secure. We need a new and stronger faith in the Church's possession of God's most precious truth. Our business is to declare that truth as we know it, in doctrine and in life, without apology or bitterness, in simple faith and hope and love. We can't compel the crowd to come, and our Lord would not permit us, even if we could. But we can preach Christ, tell about Him, and declare His grace. That is what the Church exists for. We can love men, and serve them to the utmost, for Christ's sake. That is what being a Christian means. The neglect or desertion of the crowd is not failure. Christ's successes are with individuals, one at a time. And with that success His Church must be content.

After the crowd departed, Jesus turned to His disciples with the question, Will ye also go

away? And their reply was, Lord, to whom shall we go? It was with that band, "who knew what they fought for, and loved what they knew," it was with these disciples, and not with the crowd, that Jesus wrought the stupendous miracle of the centuries of expanding Christendom since. This, then, is the conclusion of the matter—that though the crowd, as a crowd, may count for so little to the Kingdom, individual men and women can count for so much.

"For we are labourers together with God."
(1 COR. iii. 9.)

XXXIX

"SHARING IN CREATION"

FOR ages of God's creative activity, before Man was, He had no fellow-labourers. There is no animal that is a fellow-labourer with Him. God legislates for the animals, writes His laws in their members, and they cannot but obey. But when Man at last appeared, something new had come, a being capable of co-operating with God of his own free will. In Man, God has created a creator.

In the material realm, we are accustomed to that idea. We say that God made the iron in the hills but man made the tool, God made the fleece but man made the broadcloth, God gave the fire but man made the torch, the candle, the electric light. God gets His plans carried out—for we must believe that He wanted man to pass from candles to electric light—through man's creative activity, that gift and privilege He has bestowed upon him.

Is it not also true in the spiritual realm? There was no one to appreciate the beauty of

this world till man came. And, once he had seen it, man started creating beauty for himself, and so the arts were born. God is adding to the beauty of the world now, in two ways, in what He creates that man can only worship and adore, but also in the beauty, the pictures, the poems, the music which He has given man the power to create. There was no Truth in the world till man came. Animals do not know truth. Man alone seeks it and needs it. And God is spreading His truth of all sorts over the world by means of His children and fellow-labourers, men. And there was no Goodness in the world till man came. Man alone knows right and wrong. Man only is free to choose between them. And God is adding to the goodness of the world by the free choice of men, women and children.

How, then, does God get the things He wants done? How does He fit man's creatorship into His plan? If we understood that better, we should be better fellow-labourers with Him.

One way is through man's power of thought and reflection. In some kind of way, man can catch a glimpse of the march of God's purpose. Science bids him think of Creation working upwards through long ages to Man. The fact that the Universe has produced Man, who is certainly a spiritual being, and most of all that

it has produced on this earth Jesus Christ, is evidence that it is not merely a material machine. Judged by its final product, its aim is spiritual. It has been working all the time towards the spiritual. The Christian attitude to the modern revelations of the magnitude and wonder of the Universe ought to be, as Prof. W. Cosby Bell points out ("Sharing in Creation;" Bohlen Lectures for 1925), that we "belong to a spiritual system grander than we had dreamed, and are moving to destinies more alluringly interesting than we had dared to hope. We are called to be sharers in a spiritual enterprise too great for any man to measure, too great for any man to refuse." From all that, there comes a call to us to make the spiritual supreme, as it is to that end the whole processes of the Universe are moving. To do otherwise is to make vain the long travail of the past, the upward climb of creation. The animal can only be an animal, but that man should live as an animal is to betray the long struggle of the ages behind.

Another of the ways by which God works through man's freedom is by inspiration. He does not compel us, as we have seen. Rather, He stands away and beckons by the ideals He sends. That is the great work of the Bible and of all good books in degree. The words, the

dreams, the visions of holy men of old lure us on, summon us to the free service of these ideals. Not even the Bible can compel us. But it shows us what we can create by our own free choice. By every great word we have read or heard, every ideal of righteousness, every beauty of character we have seen, God is calling us to be creators in actual life of what He has breathed into our hearts.

But the greatest of God's ways is Incarnation. Ideals, after all, are cold things, if they are impersonal. Love, the magic of personality, loyalty to a person, these are mightier forces by far. God was still thinking of what man might do when He sent Jesus into the world. In Him, creation becomes “creation by personal leadership.” In Him, God tempts men, with their divine freedom of will, to choose and create what He needs and waits for—the love of goodness, the hatred of evil, the doing of His will on earth, the building of His Kingdom here.

The God whom Jesus brings is not primarily the great Autocrat who desires only perpetual adoration. He is the great Worker who desires helpers. Before man appeared, for all the creating that had been done, the enterprise of life was so far unconscious of the ends towards which it moved. “The animals,” says Dr Cosby Bell,

“were as servants that knew not what their lord did.” But with the birth of man came the possibility of conscious recognition of God’s purposes and of deliberate co-operation with Him. And, in Jesus, God’s purpose is most clearly revealed—His care for men, His passion to redeem him, His desire for his fellowship and loyal allegiance, His craving to have him work with Him, not as bond but as free, not as a servant but as a son. Jesus is God’s last and greatest Word to men, calling them to be fellow-labourers with Him. “Last of all He sent His Son.” And we are left with a picture of Him waiting till we accept Jesus as Leader in the enterprise of true, that is, spiritual living—as Leader and all else that Jesus has been, is, and can be to men.

*“ Know ye not that Ramoth
in Gilead is our’s, and we be
still, and take it not out of the
hand of the king of Syria ? ”*
(1 KINGS xxii. 3.)

XL

OUR UNAPPROPRIATED RICHES

RAMOTH in Gilead was Israel’s by covenant, but for three years of peace the Syrians had made no move to go out. And, one day, the King of Israel, stung into a serious review of the situation, said to his princes and counsellors : “ Know ye not that Ramoth in Gilead is our’s, and we be still, and take it not ? ” They were allowing their own to be kept from them, and making no effort to possess it.

Is it not true of most of us that we own very much more than we possess, that we have a wide and valuable heritage of which we allow ourselves to be dispossessed by our inaction ? Though it is really ours, “ we be still, and take it not.”

For instance, are you satisfied with your physical health ? Are you quite as fit as you would like to be and might be ? Most of us are acquiescing in ailments and disabilities that simply need not exist at all.

In the life of the mind, too, how much of what we have a natural taste and aptitude to know

and enjoy is still unappropriated! In the wide field of knowledge even of the things we are interested in—for there must be some limit, of course—our actual holding is as a “sod in a lark’s cage compared with a green summer landscape.”

But it is in the realm of spirit and character that the challenge oftenest meets us, and there that we have most need to face it. We speak of “possessing our souls.” But do we really possess them? We allow Society, and the influence of public opinion and even our friends to filch them from us. We permit ourselves to be built in by duties, claims and responsibilities that are not our own choice at all, but are imposed on us in a haphazard way, and so we get built out of our true heritage of self.

How much of our creed and beliefs is unexplored, untested, not woven into actual living experience. The faith is ours, but we have made no use of it yet, we do not really possess it. We are scraping the mere edges of fields God has given us for our own. It is a good thing, and the beginning of better things, just to realize that.

When we look away from ourselves to the face of society in our time, what saddens every observer is the pitiful relations of great sections

of us to each other. There is a desperate amount of mutual distrust, suspicion and even hostility between class and class in our day. And the great majority of us don't desire that. We are ashamed of it, and long for something better in this Christian land of ours. We have allowed ourselves to be built in by prejudice, and ignorance, and wrong and malevolent suggestions, and so built out of our true heritage of right relations with one another. And always, just on the edge of the horizon, there gleams the vision of something very different which might so easily be. All the time, the better day we desire is not so far away, and there is no reason why we should not reach it in our generation. It is possible, workable, it is what was meant to be ; it is ours in that sense, yet "we be still, and take it not." Why ? What is the reason ?

What if the reason, alike for our personal failure and our social impotence to possess more of what we own, is at bottom the same—that we are not availing ourselves of the mightiest of our resources, God Himself ?

When we realize that Christ's picture of God is that of a Father bending over a not very worthy son, and saying, "All that I have is thine," we cannot wonder that we have failed to possess the Ramoth that is really ours if we are not

honouring that trust fully and depending on that all-powerful Partner. It is an infinite quest to attain to all that God means us to be and to have, but He surely means us to get begun. And nothing could tempt us to begin more hopefully than the belief that all God's resources are held in trust for us.

Nationally and socially our trouble is the want of brotherhood. And where shall we get it? Brotherhood is a castle in the air unless it has some basis and foundation in fact. For Brotherhood is secondary, not primary, a result, not a cause. The primary, the cause is Fatherhood. We are brethren in fact because and only because we have a common Father in Heaven. Nothing else can make us real brethren except the fact that we are children of the same father, and that we know it.

So we come back, along this track also, to the same eternal need of God. That is the trouble with us, socially and industrially, as well as individually, that we are forgetting God. And what we need most for the healing of our social cleavages and distresses is a revival of real religion.

It is sheer cant, of course, for you and me to say what "the country needs." We have nothing to do with that—it is too big. The

question for us is what *we* need in the circle in which we live and work and influence others ; and the answer is—a deeper, more real and compelling sense of God. If the times are out of joint, the best contribution that we can make to setting them right is by drawing nearer to God ourselves, so that we become possessed more fully by His Spirit. It is men and women with the assurance of God in their hearts, as Jesus reveals Him, who can help to bring in the better day that might so easily come even in our time.

“ Ramoth in Gilead is our’s, and we be still, and take it not.” And we never shall take it till the sense of God’s Fatherhood and Goodwill has become so real to us that it will drive a sufficient number of men and women to rise up and say : “ Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and in God’s name we are going to possess it now, for ourselves and our children.”

*"O Lord God, Thou hast begun
to show Thy servant Thy great-
ness, and Thy mighty hand."*
(DEUT. iii. 24.)

XLI

GOD'S BEGINNINGS

WHAT filled Moses with wonder, as he neared the end of his journey, was, not so much what he had seen of God's ways and His Truth, but the thought of how much more there was to be known. He found himself contemplating, not his own little clearing but the trackless leagues that lay beyond. "Thou hast *begun* to show Thy servant."

The words lift our thoughts to the far horizons, and tempt us to set Christianity itself in this perspective. From now, back to the time of Christ, with all that His coming has meant for the world, is less than 2000 years. Add another 2000 beyond that, and you include practically all that we mean by the history of religion in any developed sense. Then ask Science how long this earth, with Man upon it, may exist, and the answer, hesitant as it must be, will certainly deal in millions of years. Millions ! And our records of Man's faith in God are as yet confined to 4000 years ! Was Moses not

right? Has not Almighty God just begun to show man His greatness? You and I stand very near the beginning of a story whose end is not only beyond human sight, but is beyond human conception.

We speak proudly to-day of modern knowledge, and we have good reason. We think of all that Man has learned—which is to say, all that God has shown him—about himself, the world of Nature, the realm of the Universe, of his progress in the arts and sciences, the growth of his ideals, the widening of his horizon. Yet of the whole bewildering amount of it, this ancient word bids us remember with a godly fear that the Eternal has only begun to show us His greatness. The vista stretches away on into the mists of the future. On, and on, and on for ever, but there is no getting to the end of the knowledge of God.

Need we wonder, then, after all, that mystery is a word so often on our lips and in our thoughts? Of course there must be mysteries when the revealing has just begun. But surely there is a glory and a promise in the mere existence of all the mysteries here, if there is Some One who knows, and from Whom we are learning. They are a hint and a witness of what a long and wonderful story the learning is going to be.

God has begun. There is no shadow of doubt that He has begun, for we do know a little. And when He has begun, who or what can stop Him?

But great as the uplift of that thought is, as a light illuminating human history, it is most of all an inspiration when we let it interpret for us our personal experience of God's goodness and grace.

Perhaps if we are to be quite honest with ourselves—and without honesty there is no true religion—we have to confess that our definite experiences of God are few and far between. One or two, perhaps, stand out memorably and unmistakably, but, for the rest, we worship without the thrill of a felt Presence, and serve from a bare sense of duty. It may be so, it may seem so, at least, without that being the whole truth of the matter. But take it at the poorest, there has, at least, been some sense of God's Presence at some season, some thankfulness for His grace, some concern with Christ, His living Word. Or, if none of these things have been, but only a deep, unsatisfied desire for them—whence, I would ask you, has the desire come? Of a surety, not without God. It is His Spirit that awakens desire in our hearts. Which is to say, that, even if we are as yet only among the seekers, and cannot claim to have found, God

has begun His work in us by making us desire Him. He has begun. Now, think what it means for God to have begun.

You have, let us suppose, a boy with some gift of music, and you greatly desire for him that some renowned Master will take him for a pupil—a Master, perhaps, whose name is a household word, and whose skill in teaching is famous. After a trial, the Master consents. You know how much hope and thankfulness would rise in your heart at the bare news that your boy had had his first lesson. Great possibilities for the future would lie in that fact. Human accidents aside, great results would seem to you certain, just because the Master had begun with your boy.

How much more when God has begun with you and me ! For Him to begin means that the end is quite certain. He does not let go when He takes hold. No one, and no accident can pluck us out of His Hand. You have said everything, you have told the whole story, however long it be, when you can say that God has *begun* to show you what you are, and what He is.

“By these things men live.”
(ISA. xxxviii. 16.)

XLII

WHAT WE LIVE BY

By these things men live, said Hezekiah, referring, strangely enough, to a very serious illness from which he had recovered. He saw in it, as he looked back, one of the great illuminating seasons of his life. To come face to face with your own soul and with God, to learn what you really are, and what He is—these, said Hezekiah, are the experiences that mould character.

There are many men who would say something not unlike that. They know that the hours which have most deeply coloured and determined life have been such things as—a certain Sacrament Sunday in a little country kirk, something said that rang like a chime within them, “a sunset touch, a fancy from a flower-bell, some one’s death.” The outward incident, indeed, may have been common or trivial, but the inward and spiritual taste of it stands out in memory. They are conscious that they reached a summit then, and got their bearings in life.

“My experience,” says the psychologist, “is

what I have given my attention to." That is true. If you have not given your attention, there can be no experience. You walk a street-length, deep in your own thoughts, and the traffic streams alongside of you, but you neither see it nor hear it. It does not enter into your experience because you are not attending to it. Your experience at that moment was what you were thinking on so closely. It is what we select to attend to in life that both makes us and reveals us.

But no man need wait for the big things to happen to him. The web of life, as it reels off for each one of us, is full of stars in the pattern if we look for them and want to find them. The whole texture of life is a Temple of God, and not just a few spots in it. Though it is only now and then, perhaps, that life does become a temple for us, it is not because God is not there at other times. Life as we live it is His design, and all of it has something to say of Him and for Him. It is when we break through to the inside view, as Hezekiah did, that the hour of high visitation strikes which we remember afterwards, and live by for many days.

Our problem is how to "break through" oftener, and extract from life's experiences what they might hold for us. On this, as on so much

else, the New Testament sheds light. When Jesus was transfigured, there were three disciples present. For them that must have been a great spiritual experience. What qualified them for it? Simply that they had been all the time in fellowship with Christ. It was not three men chosen haphazard from the crowd that He took with Him, but three that knew Him best. Isn't there a light there? Those illuminated hours of experience, when life becomes a temple and we know that God is in it, come to those, and mean most for those, whose face is set Godwards, who are seeking Him. It is true that, in His great mercy, the sudden spell that arrests a man and transforms his life sometimes seems to fall like a bolt from the blue on the careless and indifferent. Yet it is still more true that those who find the inside of some ordinary experience bringing them wondrously near to God are those who are giving their attention to anything—any practice, means of grace or service—that seems to point to Him.

Do not let us forget, however, that we can only taste and judge these moments truly when we are having them. The worst of a summit of any sort is that every step you take necessarily leads downhill. And, down from the top, the perspective alters. Seen in the cold external

light of next day, your gracious hour of the Spirit may look very intangible and far away. Do not be surprised at that. You can live by it, nevertheless. For it *is* what you knew it at the moment, and not what it seems in the recoil. You can't have your best moments for more than a moment—but you can live by them for many days.

And—this also for our heartening—faithfulness to the last hour of visitation will bring us by and by to the next. A steamer, feeling its way up channel on a dark night, turns to and steers for one beacon after another. As each is passed and drops astern, the next guiding light is by and by seen ahead. So is it with the hours of vision and insight by which men live. There is no greater heresy than to suppose that, at any stage, they all lie behind us. David once felt that he had got past the richest experiences on life, and, seeking to turn back on them, as we sometimes do, he longed for a drink from the well at Bethlehem, his boyhood's home. But when his panting soldiers had handed to him the water they had risked their lives to get for him, he saw his mistake, for there, in the devotion and loyalty of these men, was another deeper well opened at his very feet.

So with our best moments. If we are loyal

to those we have had, we shall be brought to others. You who live these days on the memory of "snow on the high Cairngorms" will, please God, see the heights again. Your heart will burn within you again as He talks with you by the way, for the Master still walks the common roads of life. The sudden light will fall on what you read, and the mists and shows dissolve, and you will catch another glimpse of—the real thing! It is by these things men live. May He who "has begun to show us His greatness" grant us the will to learn, the seeing eye, the understanding heart.

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